戦う司書と雷の愚者
Tatakau Sisho to Ikazuti no Gusha
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スーパーダッシュ

Qumola
A maid who takes care of Enlike's group.
Minth
Armed Librarian. Appears rough but has a gallant personality.
Zatoh
A mysterious man who keeps injuring himself. He is thought to be the Monster that attacked Bantorra Library, but...
Noloty
An Armed Librarian trainee. Although she is adept in melee combat, her ability is still lacking.

# 戦う司書と雷の愚者
Tatakau Shisho to Ikazuchi no Gusha

## characters

### Ganbanzel

One of the leaders of the Indulging God Cult. His goal is to create the world's strongest monster.

### Hamyuts

Acting Director of Bantorra Library. Is ruthless and extremely belligerent. Controls a sling.

### Enlike

A boy who aims to become a monster under the Indulging God Cult.

# Prologue: The Golden Monster

Lightning is incredible.

A fool thought so while gazing at the blue sparks scattered from his body.

The power of lightning is much more incredible than guns, swords, fire, water, or slings. Since lightning was impossible to avoid or protect against, it was very cruel. It couldn't be used for anything other than attacking, so it was especially pure. It could burn anything and everything to a crisp, making it good for forgetting things.

*Let's forget it all*. It was easy to forget all the unpleasant things and move on.

The fool of lightning extended his right hand. His lips moved slightly and uttered a small word.

"…Qumola."

Bantorra Library - the place built by the Overseer of the Past Bantorra during the era of the Gods. After entering through its front arch that could probably even accommodate a whole ship, there was a hall for regular visitors.

This hall that resembled the lobby of a giant hotel was usually filled with people who wanted to read Books. Historians came for Books belonging to historical figures or other people related to them, while magical researchers and scientists came to read about the accomplishments of the great men of the past; there were appreciators of art that came for the Books of artists; modern warriors came to learn from the warriors of the past; and there were also normal people who came to look for their families or loved ones.

However, none of those were inside right now, and the silent hall felt awfully chilly.

The hall was desolate.

Countless bullets hit the walls. There were more than a hundred burn marks on the thin red carpet. Also, a large amount of dried blood stains colored it here and there. The furnishing having been destroyed beyond recognition told of the severity of the battle that took place here.

The Armed Librarian Mirepoc Finedell stood alone in this hall.

Mirepoc was staring at an exceptionally large bloodstain on the carpet. While looking at it, she recalled the form of the man who fought here before.

"What's wrong, Mirepoc-san? There's nothing here anymore."

A voice suddenly called. Mirepoc turned around. The Armed Librarian Ireia Kitty had entered the hall at some point.

"Or did you find some clues?"

Ireia smiled at Mirepoc with an expression atypical of an Armed Librarian.

"…No, I was just thinking a little."

"What is it?"

Mirepoc spoke calmly while looking at the large stains of blood.

"When incidents like this happen, I regret not having gotten a fighting ability."

"…Oh dear."

"Since it's not too late, maybe I should go back to training school and reattempt my Magic Deliberation."

Ireia shook her head.

"You can't, Mirepoc-san. If you try learning any new Magic, you will approach chaos and might ruin your mind. Besides, doesn't Hamyuts-san's plan right now mean that we need active non-combat Armed Librarians like you?"

"I know. I was just grumbling."

"Let's get back to work. I was worried about you."

Mirepoc nodded and started walking after Ireia. Just before leaving the hall, she turned around and gazed at the desolate area once again.

A month ago, a man appeared here. The Armed Librarians called him a "monster".

It was incredibly clichéd. However, when she recalled that man who stood inside this hall, she couldn't find a fitting term to describe him other than a monster.

More than half a year had passed since the battle against the Indulging God Cult in Toatt Mining Town.

Cigal Crukessa – the ringleader of that plot – had already passed from this world, and the Books of Shiron Byacornish as well as the Ever-Laughing Magic Blade were now sealed in the depths of the Labyrinth.

Toatt Mining Town already regained its peace and the various traces of the incident were becoming a thing of the past.

However, no one of the Armed Librarians thought that this meant the destruction of the Indulging God Cult.

This was because, during their long history, the Armed Librarians killed many Indulging God Cult leaders just like that. Their organization was always buried and then revived. The death of Cigal didn't mean their end.

The Armed Librarians recognized the Indulging God Cult as their biggest enemies not only due to their wickedness.

Up to now, there were hundreds and thousands of the Books belonging to their followers that were never found.

Even now Cigal's Book wasn't excavated. This was also true of the Books belonging to the Bohilin Company members that obeyed him, the innkeeper that oversaw the bombs, and the bombs themselves.

If they were just stolen, the Armed Librarians could have still found them. However, because they were missing in the first place it was impossible for them.

Just where were their Books? And where was the core of the Indulging God Cult? Until they could solve these mysteries, their fight against the Cult wouldn't end. Every Armed Librarian thought this way.

Still, everyone felt relief by the death of Cigal.

It could be said that this relief gave birth to the incident that happened in that hall Mirepoc stood in.

During that day, Bantorra Library operated as usual. The front door was wide open and the hall was filled with many visitors. Some people were writing their application forms, and some that were waiting killed time by playing chess or billiards.

As usual, plenty of Armed Librarians went down to the Labyrinth in order to shelve or retrieve Books.

The average Armed Librarians, who had no combat capabilities, did all kinds of office work such as lending sealed Books or helping the people who wanted to view them.

The only abnormal thing that day was that the Acting Director Hamyuts was attending a meeting with the Present Management Agency and leaders of the world. Therefore, she was also accompanied by some other Armed Librarians. However, this wasn't a big event at all.

He appeared at afternoon of that day.

That man walked leisurely inside from the front entrance. No one obstructed his path. Seeing his figure, the people drew back and let him pass.

His appearance was bizarre. It looked as if he only wore a black cloak that was wrapped around his entire body and a helmet covering his head.

The helmet was made of shiny gold. An expression of wild laughter was carved on its face. He walked slowly, the joyous smile appearing as if the man laughed at his surroundings.

He started calmly speaking to the reception desk. His voice determined he was a male.

"Call Hamyuts Meseta here."

"And who might you be, sir?"

Even while trembling at his appearance, the receptionist answered as normal.

"Who am I?"

The shoulders of the man shook. He was laughing.

"I'm a monster that came from the Indulging God Cult. Call Hamyuts Meseta here."

The receptionist that day was a regular librarian who didn't receive any battle training. She didn't know about the existence of the Indulging God Cult, of course.

"…The Director is absent today. To call a replacement, please fill up these forms and stay in the waiting room."

The receptionist was frightened, but she still tried answering like usual.

As she did, the man burst into laughter from under the helmet.

"Please stay in the waiting room? The waiting room? The waiting room?"

The monster convulsed with laughter and his mantle twisted violently. The receptionist rose from her chair, trying to escape. An Armed Librarian or a trainee should be dealing with this kind of person. Why weren't they coming? The woman looked around.

"You've got back luck."

The monster, who stopped laughing, extended his hand. An intense explosive sound resounded. The woman's face and hair were scorched and she flew off the chair. She was killed instantly.

The people around tore the air with their screams as they started panicking. The visitors rushed for the exit. Some stumbled and fell, resulting in them getting trampled. The man with the golden helmet stared at this disorder as if ridiculing them.

This didn't mean that the Armed Librarians weren't vigilant against attacks like this. At that time there were two trainees on guard. However, even the Armed Librarians couldn't have anticipated this man erasing those trainees without anyone noticing by himself.

Finally, a single Armed Librarian came rushing in, wading his way through the chaotic crowd.

He just so happened to come out of the Labyrinth. He came after having been contacted about the presence of a strange man.

"Who are you?"

The Monster asked. The rushing Armed Librarian didn't answer. He didn't give his name when asked – that man had nothing to with chivalry and the like.

His name was Minth Chezine. He was in his mid-twenties. A leather jacket was wrapped around his swarthy body. He was a man of a robust build. A large pistol and a naked sword were casually slipped inside the thick belt around his waist.

Minth silently pulled out his gun. He shot at the Monster's chest three times. This wasn't a situation where he needed to threaten or go easy on him.

The Monster received the three shots without even trying to evade. The bullets penetrated him and then hit the walls, making cracks shaped like giant spider webs. The Monster fell forward.

Minth spit aside and returned the gun to his waist. He pulled out his sword and walked towards the man.

"What was this fiend trying to do?"

Minth muttered.

His favorite sword was a one-handed sword which was short and bulky, much like a hatchet. He lowered it towards the Monster's nape, intending to finish him off. He pulled the golden mask back, and then prepared to slice the throat that was revealed underneath it.

At that time, with a delay of a few seconds, two Armed Librarians ran inside. One was the Prediction user, Mattalast, and the other was the Thought Sharing user, Mirepoc.

Mattalast yelled towards Minth who was about to lower his blade,

"Don't cut him!"

Despite hearing those words, Minth didn't stop his sword. The moment his sword touched the Monster, a shock ran through his body.

Minth felt his blood boil. His brain and internal organs were singed. He dropped the sword from his hand and rolled away.

At the moment Minth distanced himself, Mattalast's bullets came flying in. All twelve shots from his two guns hit the collapsed Monster. His body jumped about as if convulsing.

"Minth-san!"

Mirepoc rushed over to the collapsed Minth. He was able to raise his numb body with her help.

"What… was that?"

"Lightning. He ran it through his body. If you had cut him you would've been finished."

Mattalast explained while reloading. He had probably seen Minth getting struck by lightning with his Prediction ability.

"Was that piece of shit still alive?"

"Of course… Get away!"

Hearing Mattalast's words, the two leaped.

While lying down, the Monster raised his hand.

A blue lightning struck the place they were in before. If Mattalast hadn't said anything, they would have been goners.

"Again!"

The Monster suddenly stood up as if he was a spring puppet. His cloak slowly swayed as he swung his hand. Water was emitted from his fingertips. The drop of water was shot with a speed comparable to a bullet, but held even more destructive power.

Mirepoc and Mattalast ducked. Minth who was still wounded couldn't completely evade it. His large body was blown away and slammed into the wall.

The Monster swung his hands like a conductor and kept shooting water. It was much like a machinegun shooting at all directions. The people who didn't manage to run away yet were mixed up in the attack.

While rolling on the floor, Mirepoc pulled out a gun and shot. Just before it hit the Monster, his cloak moved like a living being.

"What the…"

Mirepoc involuntarily shouted. The Monster's cloak that barely reached the floor was suddenly stretched a few meters and was wrapped around his body like a cocoon. Mirepoc saw the squirming cloth block the bullets and they fell onto the carpet.

"He's used lightning, water, and cloth. And he's also resilient. Just how many powers does he have?"

Mattalast said calmly. He then took a step forward while readying his guns.

"You two back off and cover for me. You're not combat-oriented. It seems only I can take care of him."

The Monster roared with laughter from under his mask.

"Are you an idiot?"

"Why's that?"

Mattalast replied while fixing his slightly tilted black bowler hat.

"You won't be able to handle me either."

"Is that so?"

Mattalast faintly smiled. At that moment, lightning had sprung from the Monster's hand.

The hem of Mattalast's black suit fluttered. He took quick and intense steps as if dancing. Mattalast evaded the lightning, trying to close the gap between them. It was as if the lightning was the one running away from Mattalast.

The Monster uttered in a slightly surprised voice,

"So it seems I'm going to enjoy myself more than I thought."

The battle had continued for a couple dozens of minutes. As Mattalast said, he was the only one who could handle him.

"Ahahahahahah!"

The Monster unleashed an attack while laughing. Lightning, water bullets, and stretching cloth - he kept firing those away without rest, and Mattalast kept evading them all. In order to create openings, he kept shooting. And all of his shots hit.

Mattalast's ability was Prediction. He always fought by looking two seconds ahead. He dodged the attacks that were going to hit, and made attacks that he saw would hit. Therefore, he was able to avoid any attack that could be evaded, and was able to hit with any attack that had a chance of hitting.

In this battle, it seemed at first glance that Mattalast was at an advantage. This was apparent.

Four rounds of bullets hit the head by penetrating the mask.  However, the Monster just shot water bullets at Mattalast as if nothing happened. His hat blew off as he leaped to the side and avoided it.

He had already expended fifty bullets and hit from a close range. Despite this, the Monster didn't even appear to be staggered. Mattalast avoided every attack, and the Monster was unaffected by all attacks. There was no question about who was in the lead now.

Minth and Mirepoc also covered for him by shooting from alongside the wall. However, their attacks didn't contribute much. They kept providing a passive attack without being able to come close.

A waterfall of blood flowed from under the Monster's cloak. Even while leaving deep red footprints on the floor, he still kept fighting. How long could he keep standing? Before long, Minth and Mirepoc began feeling fear.

Then, Mattalast stopped in place.

"Mirepo, pass me a gun!"

Mattalast shouted. Mirepoc and Minth guessed that he ran out of ammo.

Mirepoc threw a gun. However, as it started falling down, it was struck by lightning. Mattalast couldn't come close. A water bullet was launched at him as he was standing. For the first time, he received an attack.

At that time, Minth threw away his gun and ran forward. His aim was the Monster's back.

"Stop!"

Mattalast shouted with a hoarse voice. That attack was too reckless.

As Minth ran, he picked up his fallen sword. The Monster turned around and shot lightning. At that moment, Minth threw his sword away and the lightning hit it. He kept running and caught the sword fried by the lightning.

The scorching hot sword burned his hand. Minth clenched his teeth and struck the Monster with his entire body's weight. He felt the sensation of cutting through the spine. An unpleasant sound reached his ears as the Monster's inner organs were almost forced out of his body. *Now I've got him*, Minth believed.

But even then the Monster didn't stop. The wriggling cloth wrapped around Minth's legs.

He fell. The Monster spread his palm towards him, ready to shoot more lightning.

Suddenly, an intense impact went through the Monster's nape. Mirepoc's sword attack that used her entire body weight skewered the bones in his neck.

The large amount of blood flowing from under the Monster's mask dripped on Minth.

Mirepoc pulled the sword out. When she made an attempt for another attack, the cloth caught her hands. It lifted her body and she was pounded on top of Minth. The two groaned as the air was squeezed from their lungs.

And then, Minth saw it.

"…Uh."

The Monster opened his mouth under the mask. Inside it, fire was burning. He intended shooting that flame at them. Neither he nor Mirepoc could avoid it right now.

"Uh…"

Just as Minth saw his incoming death, he heard a strangely carefree voice.

"I still have one shot left."

Minth saw a bullet being driven inside the Monster's mouth. The lower half of his face burst up in flames.

The Monster raised a cry of anguish for the first time.

Mattalast readied his gun that should have run out of bullets.

"Sorry, Mirepo. I don't need your gun after all."

Mattalast aimed for the exact moment when the Monster would open his mouth and then try to attack.

He made a counterattack before the attack - a feat only possible for someone who could see the future. Possibly everything went according to Mattalast's plan ever since he ran out of bullets.

With his lower face blown off and a sword piercing his neck, the Monster made a huge leap. The cloth restraining Mirepoc and Minth loosened. *Is he still moving*? Minth was astonished as he raised his body.

The Monster rushed towards the exit with big leaps. Minth grabbed his burnt sword and started running. However, Mattalast stopped him.

"Let him go. Even if you pursue him you can't kill with this."

"Say what?"

"Mirepoc. Send your thoughts to the harbor and the airport."

"Huh?"

Mirepoc replied while rising up.

"Tell them that if a man with a helmet comes, let him take a vehicle without any resistance."

"Hey, if we let him go like this he'll escape!"

Minth called in rage. Even Mirepoc didn't look like she understood. Mattalast shook his head.

"Someone like you should be able to understand, Minth. He didn't use all of his power."

Mattalast showed them his two guns. He had no more bullets.

"Well, just don't blame me."

"But, it is fine just letting him escape?"

"We have to be grateful if he's just escaping. We don't want further victims."

"…Understood."

Mirepoc closed her eyes and sent her thoughts. After a short while, she said,

"He took an airplane. It appears there was no damage done."

"I see."

Minth saw an airplane flying outside the window. The three stared at it while grinding their teeth.

Mirepoc scowled as she recalled that event.

Even though they were three Armed Librarians, they let an enemy invade from the front and then even allowed him to withdraw. It could only be called a huge failure on their part.

Besides, the enemy's attack was shocking.

"Looking at the way Cigal handled things, we thought they would only attack us from the rear."

Ireia said while walking in the front.

During the battle at Toatt Mining Town, the enemy focused only on Hamyuts. His strategy involved laying out various means of attack and plans so he could make her powerless and thus defeat her.

Hamyuts, as a top-class Armed Librarian, was able to defeat the Ever-Laughing Magic Blade in a one-on-one fight. There were those who had the optimistic estimations that even in the following cases the Armed Librarians would have better combat capabilities. It was completely unforeseen that they would be attacked from the front and by a single person to boot.

"As much as it's frustrating, this is too much for us to handle. I wonder if there are even five people from our side that would have been able to rush from the front like that."

"There are probably five people that could attack from the front, but not win."

"I can't even say for sure that the Acting Director would have beaten him from close range or even mid-range. And we will be defeated for sure if we won't have at the very least two people around the level of Mattalast-san or you."

"Mirepoc-san, before thinking about defeating him, you have to think about how to find him."

Ireia rebuked Mirepoc.

Currently, a search party had been scattered around the world to locate the whereabouts of the escaped Monster. Almost all of the main forces of Armed Librarians had been sent for things like gathering intelligence from various places and escorting VIPs. Mirepoc sent the information received from them to the headquarters that would then make decisions.

However, they were barely able to make any discoveries or find further clues.

A month passed since that battle. The Monster disappeared like an illusion and left only a desolate hall behind.

"Speaking of which…"

Ireia said.

"I'm changing the subject, but… Mirepoc-san, is Noloty-chan doing her work properly?"

"Noloty? Why do you ask about her suddenly?"

"It's not a big deal, but I can't help but get worried about that girl."

"Noloty, huh?"

Mirepoc folded her arms. She recalled the face of the girl they were discussing. And as she did, she scowled.

"I'll tell the headquarters to send some assistance to her immediately."

"You sure are worrying a lot, Mirepoc-san."

Ireia giggled and made Mirepoc sigh.

# Chapter 1: The Transparent Man, the Hitting Girl

"Achoo-"

Noloty Malche sneezed.

"Did you get a cold?"

A man near her asked. He was a young man with a gun hanging from his waist. Noloty answered him while rubbing her nose.

"Can't be. I never got one."

"But it's still March. Aren't you cold wearing that?"

"I dress like this even during the winter."

She answered while pinching her clothes. However, just as the man said, Noloty Malche's attire seemed to be a little too light.

She wore a white undershirt and a sleeveless jacket on her upper body. Her pants were cut just above her knees. Although the limbs extending from her clothes were slender, they didn't seem weak at all. Her tan was like a toast, reminiscent of a wild deer dashing through the mountains.

The strangest thing about her getup was the straw rope wrapped around her limbs. It was around both knees, both elbows and both of her fists. That rope was wrapped tightly enough to bite into her skin. She didn't wear it as fashion or on a whim. It was made to protect her body that she used as her weapon.

"So you don't feel cold?"

"It's because of my training."

Noloty was inside a wide office of about twenty square meters. This room, filled with tables with several dozens of legs orderly lined up inside, was permeated by the smell of men working with the smoke of cigarettes around them. Among them, only Noloty was sitting on the sofa at the corner while spreading a newspaper. She was reading the advertisements column. A large ad was published inside.

"Looking for information about the Book stolen from Toatt Mining Town.

Any informant will receive 1000 kirue.

The provider of information that will lead to the resolution of the incident will receive 10,000 kirue.

Bantorra Library"

Noloty sighed deeply while looking at this ad.

"Hey, Noloty-san, you came back."

At that moment the door opened and a man came inside.

"Thank you for your hard work."

"Thank you for your hard work."

Voices called for the man who came inside. He was the sheriff of Bujui city. Different from the Armed Librarians who worked on a global basis, his job was maintaining the security in his region. Noloty was in the sheriff's offices used by him and his men.

"Didn't you find some informant?"

The sheriff said while stroking his mustache. He was old enough to be Noloty's father, but talked politely to her. Her position was superior to his.

"…Yes."

Noloty answered as she folded the newspaper.

Her voice was gloomy. It was a big difference from how she was in high spirits during the morning when she went out to meet the informant spoken of.

"So it didn't go well?"

"…"

Seeing Noloty wasn't answering, the sheriff's face became stiff.

"Well, it can't be helped there would be some frauds…"

He tried backing her up while sweating. She replied to him in a gloomy voice once again.

"They escaped with the money…"

"…"

The sheriff lost his words. Noloty once again sighed deeply.

"I might have to pay those 1000 kirue from my own pocket…"

"We'll somehow take care of this, so don't worry."

"…Thank you very much. I'll work hard."

The sheriff broke into cold sweat as he tried to somehow comfort the crestfallen Noloty. She feebly nodded.

She threw the newspaper onto the rack she took it from and stood up.

"I'm going out for a bit. I have the key to the office, so don't worry if I don't come back."

"Where to?"

"Just going to get some fresh air."

Saying this, Noloty tottered towards the exit. From behind her, the sheriff raised an encouraging voice.

"Err, Miss Armed Librarian… Remember you can rely on us."

Noloty, who was just about to push the door and leave, turned around and answered,

"Thank you. Strictly speaking, I'm not an Armed Librarian… but I look forward to working with you."

Noloty said and left the office.

She was in the commercial town of Bujui. It was a port town located in the west coast of the Ismo Republic. Products such as cotton, wheat and corn from the plantations to the south, as well as coals and Books from the mines to the east were gathered in this town.

It was the central town to the west of the Ismo Republic. Noloty was walking in its crowded streets.

Just as she said before, she wasn't an Armed Librarian. Noloty didn't yet have the bronze emblem that was the object of envy and awe for many people around the world.

She was an Armed Librarian in training. She was enrolled in a school teaching aspiring Armed Librarian and underwent combat training. Noloty was a so-called Armed Librarian trainee.

For trainees like her, undertaking an actual job was a chance to be promoted to an Armed Librarian. If she could safely resolve this incident, there was the possibility of her being promoted immediately. But, if she were to fail…

Once more, Noloty sighed.

"If I fail now, I might get expelled…"

She was an Armed Librarian trainee for a year already. She kept failing so she feared for her position.

This current incident was her biggest chance as well as her last.

Noloty sighed again for the umpteenth time. She was walking through the main road.

What would happen to her if she were to fail this job? She was thinking about this while walking around. She started imagining the faces of her seniors who were wearing the emblem she longed for.

First, Noloty thought of her direct superior, Mirepoc. Her cold face, that put any mission above her personal feelings, rose to Noloty's mind.

After looking through the report, Mirepoc will say to her,

"So you didn't find the Book."

And then throw it away.

"S-sorry."

When Noloty would lower her head to apologize like usual, Mirepoc will probably say,

"Why are you apologizing?"

"Umm… Because of the mission…"

"How many times do I have to say this? Being incompetent is a crime by itself for us Armed Librarians. Can you make up for your incompetence?"

"U-umm, well…"

Noloty was able to vividly imagine herself mumbling in such a pitiful way.

"What's done is done. What I want to know now is how you're going to make up for your incompetence."

Mirepoc would then continue her preaching in such an indifferent yet persistent manner.

Noloty will just say "I quit" when that happens.

It was scary. Too scary. If she were to quit, she would at least like that to happen in a nice way.

Thinking of a nice person, it was now Ireia's face that rose to Noloty's mind. Despite being nearly sixty, the old Ireia was still in active service.

But that wasn't good at all, Noloty decided inside her head. Ireia was scary in a different way than Mirepoc. She will probably not get angry. Despite this, she would say the following towards Mirepoc while standing next to her:

"So you didn't find the Book. What shall we do, Mirepoc-san?"

"I will go to Bujui and request an urgent cooperation between the Armed Librarians and the Republic's search party."

"Yes, I also think that is good."

"I think we should also report this to the Director and ask for instructions."

"Yes, that's a good idea. As expected from Mirepoc-san."

And then, Ireia will point at Noloty while smiling and say,

"By the way, just who is this young lady over there?"

That was scary. It was far scarier than Ireia being angry at her. Noloty's shoulders trembled.

Another kind senior would be Mattalast. He seemed easygoing, but he could be relied upon.

After indifferently reading Noloty's report, that man will surely say,

"I see. By the way, how about we go and drink a little afterward? I found a good place recently. Do you drink alcohol?"

With a wide smile on his face. That's the kind of person he is.

And he will add the following while laughing,

"Because you're going to get fired. You have my best regards."

He would say this in an unbelievably calm manner. But that was also painful in a different sense.

Noloty kept imagining what kinds of scary words her seniors would send her way. Meanwhile, as she walked in the middle of the road, she started muttering to herself. The various people heading for their homes on the streets were avoiding this strange girl.

The senior Armed Librarians in Noloty's fantasies kept throwing terrible words at her. Her fantasy kept escalating until it finally reached the worst-case scenario. What would happen if she would anger Acting Director Hamyuts Meseta?

The Director might not even read Noloty's report. She would then expose her terrifying smile, like that of a carnivore beast in a good mood, and walk towards Noloty.

And, she will say the following while grabbing her face with narrow fingers:

"What should I tear off?"

Noloty will then raise a scream. That person won't have any problem saying things like that. No, she will definitely say that. Noloty was even able to imagine the tone of Hamyuts's voice.

"Oh, there you are, Noloty."

She had no choice but to escape, Noloty thought to herself. There was someone who once said that it wasn't shameful to run for your life. But if she were to escape, something even scarier might happen.

"Heeey, Noloty?"

Noloty, immersed in her delusions, didn't notice that voice. She kept walking around while muttering to herself.

"Hey, can't you hear me? Turn around!"

Then, something hit the back of Noloty's head. When she turned and looked down, she saw a small pebble rolling on the pavement. She turned around wondering who hit her. Noloty then raised a muffled scream.

She saw a woman picking up the stone from the ground. That woman was the Acting Director of Bantorra Library, Hamyuts Meseta.

Hamyuts put the stone inside her pocket and walked with her body swaying towards Noloty.

"Didn't you hear me? I was calling you pretty loudly."

At that moment, Noloty understood the feelings of a mouse that was swallowed whole and then melted in a snake's stomach. She didn't even think about wanting to get rescued or running away. Noloty experienced a state where her brain refused to function.

"Why are you so stiff?"

Hamyuts looked into Noloty's face. She waved her hands before her eyes, pinched her nose and pulled her ears.

"Sorry, Acting Director!"

She somehow managed to say this with her shaking voice.

"Are you all right?"

Noloty violently shook her head up and down. Hamyuts raised an eyebrow and scratched her cheek.

"Such a strange girl."

Noloty and Hamyuts walked side by side.

Hamyuts told Noloty that she only came here for her report. When Noloty regained her senses, she tried going back to the sheriff's office to take the unfinished report. However, Hamyuts said,

"An oral report is fine, let's do it while walking."

She pointed with her chin for Noloty to follow her, and started walking in the opposite direction of the main road. Noloty had no idea where she was heading, but she went after her.

As Noloty became calm, she had a single question. Why did the Director come here? Bantorra Library was far away. This wasn't a place you'd just come to visit. Besides, it should have been busy in the Library right now.

"Let me confirm- your mission is the retrieval of Luimon Mahaton's Book?"

Hamyuts said.

"Yes."

"Describe the current situation as simple as possible."

Noloty nodded and began speaking.

The incident started six months ago. It happened in Toatt Mining Town, which was six hours by train from the commercial town Bujui Noloty was in right now.

The Toatt Dragon Pneumonia Incident - as it came to be called now - was said to be the first big incident in a hundred years. It was a crisis on a global level; the discovery of the Book of the historical Shiron Byacornish, discovery of the lost Memorial Weapon – the Ever-Laughing Magic Blade Shlamuffen - and a front clash between the Indulging God Cult and the Armed Librarians. Furthermore, Hamyuts Meseta, the one said to be the world's strongest warrior, was cornered and almost killed. Although the details weren't disclosed to the general public, among the Armed Librarians and informed people there was no one who didn't know of this incident.

During that incident, a single Armed Librarian lost his life. His name was Luimon Mahaton. He was an Armed Librarian who used his body that weighed over 100 kilograms as well as his superhuman athletic capabilities as his weapons. He had a

gentle personality but possessed a strong sense of responsibility. While he was still a novice, he handled illegal trafficking as well as educating the next generation, so a lot of people – not only Armed Librarians – have mourned his death.

Luimon's Book was found five months after his death. His Book was dug out and guarded in Toatt Mining Town.

Noloty didn't have to explain this part to Hamyuts. She summarized it and went to the next topic.

"It was excavated in January 21st."

"About how many people knew about it?"

"…One of the miners was Luimon-san's acquaintance, so a lot of people talked about it. If there was someone who wanted Luimon-san's Book in Toatt Mining Town, they probably already knew about the exact day."

"It's because Luimon was well-liked, huh."

Hamyuts said in a slightly lonely tone. Noloty also recalled Luimon's giant body and bright smile.

"And what happened to the Book afterwards?"

"It was put inside the station's safe sometime around that day's night. The next day, it was taken to Bujui by train, where it was supposed to be received by escorts dispatched from Bantorra and then taken to the Library by boat."

"And you were supposed to be that escort."

Noloty nodded. When she arrived at Bujui by boat, the first thing she heard was how Luimon's Book was stolen.

"Where was it stolen?"

"When it was on the train."

"Were the passengers investigated?"

Noloty nodded. Even she did as much as that.

"Everyone was questioned, but we didn't find any suspicious persons."

"Hmm… were there any other points of interest?"

"Yes. There were signs of someone rampaging in the train."

"Rampaging? Not just fighting?"

"…There were no fighters inside the train. Since someone boarded the train while it was running and stole Luimon's Book, I can't think of it as anything other than rampaging. They destroyed the vault as well as the engine room so there were holes in the walls and floor."

"A strange story."

"Someone who can board a train while it is running must have some considerable physical abilities. I didn't find any information about some criminal organization targeting Books with such skilled members."

"Hmm. It's not necessarily a Book-stealing organization."

"Huh?"

"What's the situation right now?"

"I'm looking for informants while cooperating with the sheriff against the local Book-stealing organizations."

"No, no. That won't do. Because you're trying to wring out the enemies, you should search for fitting people who aren't a part of any Book-trafficking organization."

"…"

"That criminal organization didn't necessarily steal it for money in the first place. You shouldn't limit the scope of your investigation."

"…"

"Think wider. Your investigation is full of blind spots."

Noloty dejectedly lowered her shoulders. She was working hard on this, but apparently this was only a slight diversion for Hamyuts. She couldn't help but get angry.

"Well, it's fine, it's fine."

Hamyuts thoughtlessly smiled. No matter how hard Noloty thought about it, she couldn't refute her words.

"But it sure is interesting."

"Huh?"

Noloty couldn't understand what Hamyuts meant by that.

"What's interesting?"

"I'm not talking about this incident."

"…?"

Hamyuts suddenly stared at her face. Noloty flinched a little.

"Hey, how would you like some distraction?"

"Huh?"

Looking at Noloty, her smile was like that of a person eyeing a splendid toy.

"A d-distraction?"

"I have something interesting for you. Something very interesting."

Noloty felt completely chilled by the smile Hamyuts pointed at her. She suddenly had the feeling she was about to experience something a bit different than what she had imagined, but scary nonetheless.

The two walked around the town. They went away from the sheriff's offices in the city's center, towards the dark and dirty places that had a bad name. *Just where are we going?* …was what Noloty didn't ask. She didn't think Hamyuts would let her go if she asked, so she just went with her.

More importantly, she thought about something different. Hamyuts was supposed to be at the helm of the hunt after the Monster.

"Umm, how is the incident in the headquarters going along?"

"What?"

"Umm, I mean the attack on Bantorra Library. I heard that you were heading it, Director, but…"

"Hmm? Well, it's going along little by little."

Hamyuts said in an almost bored tone. Noloty became uneasy. Having the commander be disinterested in that incident was troubling.

"Also, your information was mistaken. The old lady's in command."

"Old lady… you mean Ireia-san?"

"I believe she is far more suitable to be the Acting Director. It doesn't really fit my personality."

Noloty looked around them to confirm no one was listening in on their conversation, and then said with a low voice,

"Is that fine? After all, that Cult is involved in this…"

"Stop talking about that."

Hamyuts shot at her.

"You shouldn't be interested in things unrelated to you. Knowing this goes hand in hand with taking responsibility. Because of that it's annoying telling this to people who can't take responsibility."

"…Right."

Noloty obediently stopped asking further questions. Since she felt swamped already just with Luimon's incident, she certainly didn't want any more responsibilities.

"Ooh, they're going at it!"

Hamyuts said and stopped.

A crowd gathered in a vacant lot around the back alleys. There were a lot of ill-bred people around as well as some women in flashy outfits. From among the crowd, abusive sentences such as "die", "get him", "dammit" were flying around. Hamyuts and Noloty set foot amongst this crowd that didn't look peaceful at all. Since the two women suddenly appeared in front of the men's eyes, they started whistling and using obscene words.

The center of the crowd was a circle. Inside that circle were two men. One of them rolled his sleeves to the shoulders, while the other one had his shirt off. The steam rising from their sweating bodies mixed with the chilly afternoon air. The two clutched their fists and were beating each other.

It looked like a so-called fight club.

"L-let's go back."

"Oh, you don't like such things?"

"…Isn't it scary?"

"What're you saying? If we go all out nobody here stands a chance."

It was certainly true. Despite Noloty being a trainee, she aspired to become an Armed Librarian. No matter their numbers, men who couldn't use Magic wouldn't be serious enemies for her. Hamyuts could probably beat everyone here in about ten seconds.

"But it's still scary."

"You're such a strange girl."

While talking, they watched the two people inside the circle.

At first Noloty had thought they were hitting each other, but she now saw it wasn't so. Only one was attacking. The other man, despite clearly being in a position to counterattack, didn't do anything. He was also clearly able to defend himself, but didn't.

"The white one is stronger."

Hamyuts said at one glance. Noloty understood this as well.

The so-called white one was the man not attacking. He was about 185 centimeters tall. His body was somewhat thin but well-toned. He wore simple black clothes. The hair tied on his back was either grey or silver, colored like fresh snow.

His movements were good. He possessed well-polished melee techniques without any wasted movements.

In contrast, the one attacking was much below him. He had a soft and somewhat plump body. He only wielded his fist with his entire strength and didn't move his legs. At best he could handle a casual scuffle.

The white one deliberately evaded the attacks at the last moment. At time he let himself get hit, and at times he pretended to have been affected by it. If he wanted to, he could easily defend against the attacks of the half-naked man.

*What are they doing?* Noloty asked herself. Looking around, she found a billboard placed further along the plaza. The following was casually written with paint on that billboard that was made of scrap material:

"Beat me up – 100 kirue for a minute. You get 10,000 kirue if you defeat me"

Then, the crowd around cheered.

"The minute's over!"

The half-naked man grabbed his fallen shirt and put it on his shoulder. A cheap-looking woman snuggled close to him.

"Stupid, didn't you say you were going to buy a new necklace for me?"

She said with a sweet sounding voice.

"One more time!"

The man took ten bills of ten kirue and put them inside the box next to the signboard.

"You sucker!"

"Just give up!"

About half were jeering at him,

"Go, don't let him rest, attack him!"

"Aim at his stomach, his stomach!"

And the others were cheering.

*If I'll wait for the damage to accumulate, I'll be able to beat him for sure* – half of the people gathered there thought.

The beaten man was able to withstand another minute. Noloty understood that while it looked as if he was barely holding on, he actually protected himself with no danger at all. When the minute was over, the half-naked man dejectedly fell on his knees. The woman next to him tried cheering him, but he shook off her hands.

"Who's next?"

The beaten man spoke for the first time. His voice was a clear and low baritone.

"Here!"

The one who raised her voice was Hamyuts. The cheers and whistles coming from the surroundings mingled with sounds of jeering and laughter. Noloty became confused and thought of stopping her, but Hamyuts grabbed her shoulders and pushed her into the circle.

"She'll be next!"

There were further cheers and whistles. Hamyuts cheerfully took out her wallet and put a 100-kirue bill inside the box.

"U-umm, this is…"

Everyone around was already pumped up. She couldn't decide what to do. Still, Noloty tried talking to the man to somehow avoid this situation.

"Umm, even if I look like this, I'm a trainee Armed Librarian, so I probably shouldn't be doing something like this…"

"Let's begin."

The man said with a murmur.

"L-let's not do it..."

While she was saying this and standing around flustered, some time had passed.

"Thirty seconds."

Booing came flying at her. Even Hamyuts gave her a thumbs-down.

Noloty clenched her fist in a hurry. For now, she would try not to go overboard with hitting him.

"Hah!"

With this small cry, she lightly hit his chest.

Then, she stumbled a step backwards.

Noloty was surprised. She only gave him a slight jab, but it should've been enough power against an amateur. Even if it wouldn't defeat him, she expected him to at least fall from the recoil. She never experienced this feeling similar to having punched a boulder except against opponents of the Armed Librarian level.

"So you're not going to hit me?"

The man said to the puzzled Noloty who stuck her fist out. Noloty understood he was making light of her.

"Umm, this time I'll hit you for real."

Noloty declared. At the very least, she had pride in her hand-to-hand combat skills as a trainee.

"Five more seconds."

"Here I come!"

Lowering her waist, Noloty launched with full force at his stomach. After she swung her fist with her entire body weight, she could feel an impact running through her wrist. The man's body was pushed two meters back along with two scraping marks on the pavement. But due to him firmly placing his feet on the ground, he didn't collapse.

"No way…"

Noloty muttered.

"Should we continue?"

Said the man. Noloty then noticed that a minute had passed. The surroundings became noisy. Murmurs such as "Wasn't that punch amazing?", "no way, it was just acting", "he just let himself get pushed back" were heard.

"Let's go back."

Hamyuts said. The stunned Noloty pulled herself together after hearing that voice.

"We're not going to continue?"

The man said.

"I have to go now."

"…I see."

The man looked disappointed. Noloty noticed he was looking with those eyes not at her, but at Hamyuts Meseta.

"Do you want something from the Director?"

The man didn't answer. He just silently gazed at Hamyuts.

It was then that Noloty realized something.

It was about the man's hair. The hair that seemed to be white didn't reflect the light of the sunset. The light that came from behind just flowed past his hair. It wasn't silver or white; it was translucent like tender glass.

"What are you doing? Let's go."

"Y-yes!"

Noloty turned her back to the man that kept looking at Hamyuts and walked with her.

"That guy was amazing. You hit him for real, right?"

Hamyuts started speaking while walking in the front. Noloty couldn't understand her intentions.

Who was this man? He was tough enough to withstand her real attack. Also, he had transparent hair. A person with hair color different from the norm should be a Magician with vast powers.

And, what was Hamyuts trying to do?

It couldn't be that this was a test to see if she would be fired, right…?

"An Armed Librarian that couldn't beat that man needs to be fired. He'll be your replacement" - Noloty felt a shiver down her spine as she thought about Hamyuts saying this.

But Hamyuts didn't say anything of the sort and was only walking. As usual, Noloty couldn't understand what she was thinking about.

"Hey, Noloty. I have one thing to tell you, and then I'll leave you with one order."

Saying this, Hamyuts stopped in her tracks and turned around.

"What is it?"

"First I'll tell you something. That man's name is Zatoh Rondohone. He's the one who stole Luimon's Book."

Noloty blankly opened her mouth.

"How do you…?"

"I won't tell you."

Hamyuts grinned.

"Now, for my order. Listen carefully. You can't talk about this even with other Armed Librarians. This is a so-called top secret mission."

"Y-yes ma'am."

"Zatoh once killed a person and read his Book. Ever since that, he wanted to kill himself."

"…What does that mean?"

"Now I'll give my order. Listen well."

Hamyuts put a finger on Noloty's lips.

"Save Zatoh-kun. When he's in real trouble, please save him."

"What do you mean?"

"That's it. See ya."

Hamyuts let go of Noloty's lips and turned around. Noloty looked at the fleeing Hamyuts with blank amazement. After she came back to her senses, she chased after her in a hurry.

"W-w-wait a second!"

However, Hamyuts already disappeared to somewhere along the alley. Noloty looked around but immediately gave up. Finding the Director once she was gone was next to impossible. Since Hamyuts specialized in sniping, she was also skilled in hiding herself.

"Oh man… what was that?"

While muttering so, she turned around to leave the alley.

At that moment, Noloty found a man standing at the alley's exit.

His appearance was unforgettable. He was Zatoh Rondohone.

"Where's Hamyuts Meseta?"

Zatoh asked with a low voice.

"I saw her come here before, where did she go?"

Zatoh slowly walked forward. His eyes stared at Noloty. His gaze was terribly sharp and he seemed somewhat sad.

He once killed a person and read his Book. Therefore, he wishes to die.

While looking at his eyes, Noloty recalled those words.

# Chapter 2: First Past – A Ship's Bottom

It was one year before the Monster assaulted Bantorra Library.

In a small island far from Bantorra, a minor incident had occurred.

That island's sky was crystal-clear and the sea was calm as if time had stopped. The crabs walking on the sandy beach didn't pay any heed to the men standing there, and birds flew in the sky as if they owned the place.

There were three men on that empty beach.

Or maybe it would have been more accurate to say two men. One of those three lay on the sand because he couldn't ever move again.

The dead man was young. He was at an age only slightly past boyhood. He wore an old-looking military uniform. The front of his body had been burned beyond recognition. His face and body had been scorched by intense flames and he probably died an immediate and painless death.

The two men stood next to that corpse.

"Zatoh-sama, it was truly disappointing."

One man had said. He was a plain-looking man at the prime of his life.

"Indeed. He was different than what I heard, what was that supposed to be?"

The other man – Zatoh – had answered. His long, transparent hair fluttered in the sea breeze.

"Well, it doesn't matter. Just do it, Lascall-san."

Zatoh said. The aged man – Lascall Othello – gracefully bowed.

"As you wish. Please wait a little."

Lascall kneeled on the sand and brought out a strange dagger from his breast pocket. Its handle looked like a human hand and its blade was made of stone. The man held that strange dagger with a backhand grip in a completely impractical way.

"What is this?"

"This is the Passed Stone Blade Yor. It is the eighth Memorial Weapon which was not supposed to exist."

As he said this, Lascall Othello thrust the blade into the ground. The sand around it took the form of a Book on the dagger's tip.

"Oh… that's incredible."

Zatoh exclaimed.

"Is that his Book?"

Zatoh pointed at the boy's corpse left aside.

"That is indeed true. Here you go."

Lascall prompted him. Zatoh reached for the Book that was inside the sand. When Lascall saw that his hands were bare, he raised an eyebrow in confusion.

"Ah, do you intend to read it?"

"Yeah."

"How unusual. But why?"

Zatoh smiled.

"I'm interested in this Monster guy."

His fingers touched the Book and the boy's memories flowed inside him.

He was inside a stone room. The size of that room was about ten square meters. There was a small oil lamp on the ceiling, which was the only thing illuminating the room. It was very dim. The room had only one door. That hard cold steel door separated the room from the outside.

He sat directly on the stone floor, hugging his knees like a baby inside his mother's womb.

There were no chairs or even any bed sheets. Only clothes that looked like rags were warming his body. These shabby cotton clothes were damp with filth and sweat, and thus made his whole body dirty.

The boy appeared to be around fifteen years old. He had black hair and eyes. He was somewhat short and dirt clung to his skinny body. When he would scratch his skin with his overgrown nails, layers of grime and dirt would peel off of them. He emitted a smell that would make one want to turn their face away, but he didn't think anything of it. It was natural for him.

Including him, there were fifteen men inside the room. Their ages were diverse – there were some that looked to be in their teens like him, and others that looked like they were also past sixteen. Everyone was dressed in rags just like him.

He was a Meat.

He was a clothed livestock kept by the Indulging God Cult. They all were simply lumps of meat, without any memories or wills, waiting to be used in experiments or be turned into bombs.

As for his name – he didn't care for such a thing.

Why would a being without any memories, will, or a reason for living have a name?

He explored the gloomy floor by hands. Everything his hands touched he would pick up and put in his mouth. They were bread crumbs. He spit them out after a bite. They were moldy.

Once again he looked for bread crumbs on the floor. However, all he could find were crumbs that were spat out by someone. Occasionally the crumbs he picked up were too small or all moldy.

Many of the other men also looked for bread crumbs on the floor just like him. The gross sounds of chewing and spitting resounded in the dark room. From time to time, there were also the sounds of excretions of bodily waste from the corner of the room.

The door suddenly opened. A man holding a bucket stood on the other side. He seemed to be a man in his forties smoking a cigarette. He was the one in charge of taking care of the Meats.

"Meats. It's washing time."

After the caretaker said this, the Meats all stood up and pressed on the walls. The caretaker started scattering water from the bucket, washing away the moldy bread crumbs. Then, he sprinkled some more bread crumbs on the floor. The Meats jumped on them. Raising a cry like hungry stray dogs, they picked up the fresh bread crumbs, striving to be the first ones to eat.

The boy's hand touched a large bread piece. A man near him stretched his hand in order to take it from him. He shook off the Meat's hand. Here and there, people were scrambling for the pieces of bread in a similar way.

The caretaker stared at them doing this, annoyed.

"Disgusting. How longer will I have to do this job?"

He mumbled.

Then, a bread piece rolled at his feet. The boy reached for it. However, he was pushed aside by another Meat, rolled on the floor and hit the caretaker's feet.

"Don't you touch me!"

The caretaker kicked the Meat. He rolled on the floor without raising any cry. No one would even look at him.

"Damn it, I hate it. Hey you, come here!"

The caretaker said and grabbed the boy's collar, raising him up.

"Go and reflect in the punishment cell."

He was dragged out of the room by his collar.

The place called the punishment cell wasn't any different from the room he was in before. It was simply colder and no bread crumbs were thrown around. He was put inside for a day or two. During that time, he had to withstand the cold and hunger.

Another boy around the same age had been inside the room. He sat down on the opposite corner of that boy.

He was thrown inside this punishment cell for some trivial reason – no, for no reason at all, but he couldn't get angry. He just wasn't like that. He understood he was meaningless. He was worthless. Because he was worthless, if he were to be put inside the punishment cell or even killed, he would just accept it.

He wouldn't be allowed to refuse. He couldn't even think about refusing. Someone without any value couldn't be allowed anything.

In order to bear the cold, he shrank his body and rubbed his toes together. Then, a voice called to him from the other corner.

"If you're cold there, come here."

He didn't understand he was being talked to. He also didn't understand that the boy at the other corner was talking to him. Meats never conversed with one another.

He stopped thinking about this impossible situation.

"…Well, if you don't want to I don't really mind."

When he didn't answer anything, the person on the other side spoke with displeasure. Meats never sounded displeased. That boy was also different in that sense.

He stared at the boy. He felt fear.

He was supposed to be the same as him, but he was different. It was similar to when a sheep noticed a goat slipped into its herd. He was silent for a while. The other boy was also silent.

After about an hour, the other boy opened his mouth.

"Who are you?"

He asked. The boy replied to him without reflexively.

"What are you?"

It was a long time since he used his voice. He had forgotten how to do it.

"You don't need me to tell you. I'm a Meat just like you."

The boy answered while scratching his nose.

"I'm Relia Bookwatt. And you?"

He couldn't understand the question directed to him.

"Answer me. Even you should have some name, right?"

He remembered. Right, he did have a name. He didn't think about it in a long time.

He then identified himself.

"…I'm Enlike. Enlike Bishile."

It felt terribly strange giving his name. It was like he admitted himself being a human and not anything else.

Thus, he found some meaning for the first time. He was an individual. Enlike Bishile's story slowly began at this moment.

Enlike looked at Relia who sat in front of him. He was a strange Meat who asked for his name for the first time. He was staring at him while feeling confusion and fear.

"What did you do?"

Relia asked him.

"Nothing."

Enlike replied.

"You haven't done anything but they still put you here… how horrible."

Relia frowned.

"What did you do?"

"Me?"

"Yeah."

Enlike nodded. Enlike was a bit surprised at having made a conversation. It was the first time he found out he could do such a thing.

"Someone in the same cell as me got a fever. I told the caretaker to get some medicine. That's all."

"…Medicine?"

Enlike's face slightly distorted.

"Such a thing is not allowed."

"Seems to be the case."

Relia bent his cheek while saying so. Enlike noticed it was swollen. He was probably hit by the caretaker.

"You're bad. Don't do such things."

Enlike said.

"I didn't do anything wrong. I just said it."

Relia answered while shrugging. However, Enlike didn't stop.

"Talking is wrong. Thinking is wrong. Meats can't think about things like that."

"…What's that supposed to mean?"

Relia seemed a bit gloomy. Enlike still kept talking.

"I was taught this long ago. We're Meats. We look like humans but are different. We're beings who simply live and die without having any value."

"What are you trying to say?"

"Those who are worthless also have no rights. We don't have the right to say or think anything.

We're not allowed to want medicine."

"Is that how you really think?"

Relia said as he shook his head to the side as if saying he couldn't agree.

"Even if we were told to not think, thinking is just thinking. It can't be helped."

"It can be helped!"

Enlike shouted as if to refute Relia. Even he couldn't understand why he shouted.

"Why are you angry?"

Relia stared at the angry Enlike.

"…Don't do such things."

"…I'm asking why you're angry."

Enlike glared back. For a while, they simply stared at each other.

"Hey, Enlike. Why are you angry?"

"It's unforgivable. Meats are not allowed to think about such things. Because we're worthless."

Relia glared at Enlike with hostility. The atmosphere between the two already became one of enemies.

"We're not allowed to think about anything. We have no value."

"That's wrong."

Relia spoke resolutely.

"I'm… I'm not worthless."

"What?"

Enlike didn't understand what he said for a moment. He only managed to utter this. While glaring at Enlike, Relia repeated himself.

"I'm not worthless. Even if I'm a Meat, I'm not worthless."

"…You're strange."

Before he noticed, Enlike's fear turned into anger. He thought from the depths of his heart that he couldn't forgive this boy.

"We don't have anything. Here we only eat bread crumbs, shit, and someday die.

We get used in experiments or become bombs and die. That's all. Do we have any value? Or do you still think that it can't be helped?"

Enlike spat.

"I don't. This is obvious."

"If you understand, then give up! We're all worthless!"

Enlike kept shouting without understanding what made him angry.

"No. Even if we're Meats, guinea pigs or bombs, it's still the same.

I'm not worthless."

"…So why, you bastard?!"

Enlike rose up and started running. He almost stumbled as his weak legs made this sudden movement.

He pushed the sitting Relia and grabbed his throat. With his frail thumbs he started crushing it.

"What… are you…"

Relia resisted. He scratched Enlike's face and poked his eyes. Enlike raised a cry of pain and shook off Relia's hand.

"You little…"

Relia kicked him and he tumbled to the floor.

"What are you doing?"

Enlike stared at Relia while breathing roughly. There was no anger on his face.

"It's unforgivable. Why are you the only one to say such things? Why are you the only one to have value?"

His expression was that of jealousy. He envied and hated this man who declared he had some worth.

"Why are you the only one…"

Enlike's voice stopped.

"Enlike, I'm…"

Just as Relia was about to say something, a voice called to them. The heavy iron door opened and a man lazily walked in.

"Huh? What're you two doing?"

It was the caretaker. Enlike and Relia looked at him while breathing heavily.

"What are you doing, you Meat? Stand up, your punishment is over."

The caretaker said in a casual manner and grabbed Relia's hand. Enlike was also about to stand up. He wanted to shout that the conversation wasn't over yet.

"Enlike, I'm…"

Relia tried saying something.

"Why're you talking?!"

The caretaker struck Relia with his fist. Relia cowered so the caretaker once again forcibly raised him.

"…Oh, right, you blabbered something about a medicine."

The caretaker suddenly said while dragging Relia. He sneered at him.

"Stupid. That brat was fine."

"…Huh?"

For a split second, the wounded Relia's face appeared to be beaming.

"Fine?"

"It was the sort of illness that didn't need any medicine in the first place. You're such a stupid Meat."

The caretaker laughed at him.

"I see."

Relia muttered in a low voice. At that moment, Enlike could see it. The expression on Relia's swollen face had changed.

"So… they're fine."

Relia muttered. Enlike could see his facial expression changing. He slightly lifted his beaten, swollen cheeks. His mouth became curved and his eyes slightly thinner.

Enlike knew that expression although he hadn't seen it in a long time nor remembered it.

It was a smile.

The door was closed and Enlike was left by himself.

The expression Relia had when he left was carved into Enlike's heart.

He could remember it as if he was just in front of him right now.

*Why did that guy smile*? Enlike thought.

*Why can he smile*? He thought.

He could only think of his life up till now and from now on as painful. Enlike could withstand it only because he had given up on everything.

However, Relia had smiled. He was supposed to be the same as Enlike, yet he smiled.

He recalled the existence of the thing called a smile. He remembered there was the thing called a smile in this world, and wondered if he could smile as well.

It was more painful than anything. Sometimes, hope was more painful to a man's heart than despair.

Enlike started sobbing.

"Why can he smile?"

He kept crying and soon fell asleep. He kept sleeping without noticing his hunger.

The day for Enlike to come out of the punishment cell had arrived. The caretaker took him back to his previous room.

He stuffed himself with a few bread crumbs, went to the corner of the room and sat down. He turned his face towards the wall so the other Meats couldn't see him.

There was one thing he wanted to try out. He simply had to try it.

Enlike put strength into his lips. He strongly pulled his lips and made a trembling small change in their shape. He raised the edges of both of his lips. His eyes twitched as he narrowed them. His eyebrows frowned as if he was withstanding terrible pain, and his lips raised the meat on his cheeks.

That expression didn't look like a smile at all. There was no sense of unity to speak of; all parts of his face were terribly mismatched. It was just a weird face somehow resembling a smile. It was nothing more than an awkward imitation.

"…Dammit."

Muttering this, Enlike released the tension in his face. He didn't have a mirror, but he could still tell - this couldn't be called a smile. It was only a distorted face.

*I'll try again*, he thought.

One again Enlike twisted his face like before. This time he thought he would try making a voice. Maybe if he laughed he would also be able to smile freely.

"…Haahaa…"

However, the voice leaking from his mouth was like the call of some bird. It was far away from being laughter, so naturally his face also didn't make a smile and simply looked weird.

"…Dammit."

Once again Enlike cursed himself. It didn't go well.

"Wha, what are you doing?"

A Meat called to him. His expression didn't seem to indicate any shred of intelligence. It seemed he was mentally broken to the extent he could barely speak words.

"…I'm trying to smile."

Enlike answered while still facing the wall.

"S…smile? Haha, aaaah. What's that?"

"I don't know."

Enlike didn't even face the Meat that was questioning him. He could no longer understand his words.

"Heeheehee, hehehehea, haahaahaa."

The Meat wobbled around the room while raising a voice that sounded like a cross between wailing and laughing.

"Why?"

Enlike murmured.

"…Why can he smile?"

After thinking this, he held and head and began sobbing again.

Some time had passed. Trying to smile became Enlike's daily routine. Every day he would distort his face and then give up. While doing it his face wore a melancholic expression, completely contrary to his goal.

One day, the door to Enlike's room opened and several caretakers came inside. It was different than usual. That day they didn't bring a basket full of bread crumbs, but instead looked around the Meats as if searching for something.

"Pick a good Meat. Cigal-sama and Ganbanzel-sama are coming to visit today."

One caretaker said.

"Yes, I know. Which one should I choose?"

He briefly looked around the room and,

"Let's try this one."

He grabbed Enlike's hand.

"This one's a strange Meat. Sometimes he makes a weird face. Like this."

Saying this, one of the caretakers imitated Enlike's face to show to the other men. They all laughed. It was unpleasant, but Enlike couldn't do anything.

The caretakers took him out from the room and into a large room at the top of the deck. It was his first time getting out of the ship's bottom area. The sunlight and blue sea dazzled Enlike's eyes.

The room he was taken to wasn't a room for Meats, but for their caretakers. Unlike the Meats' room below, this one was clean and pleasant.

Its size was about five times the Meats' room. In the middle was a large cage of about the same width as the Meats' room.

Enlike was told to go inside the cage. In addition to him there was another person inside. That person who wore awfully baggy clothes had his entire head covered by a helmet. From the size of his body he seemed to be a man. A smiling face had been carved on the white helmet that he wore.

There were several men outside the cages - the caretakers who brought Enlike here, some men who wore white coats, and at the far back of the room, a man with long hair and an old man were sitting on a couch.

Looking at these last two, one could tell at a glance they were the most important people inside the room.

"Hmph. It seems you also had an amusing idea, but I have no interest in it.

I think there's another way to defeat Hamyuts Meseta."

The long-haired man sitting on the sofa said.

"Hmm, Cigal. I'm tired of your bluffs. You keep saying you have a way to defeat her but you won't do anything."

The old man replied to him.

"Hahaha, that is because the time isn't ripe yet. Besides, I have far more obstacles in my way besides just Hamyuts."

"Hehehe, you always nag on and on about money, money, money, money. I can't understand you at all."

"I can't understand you either. Why would we, True Men who are second only to God, try to create something that exceeds us?"

"I don't remember telling this to you."

"Well, it doesn't really matter. True Men are usually isolated from one another. People like us who get along are the exception."

"Haha, that's true."

Enlike couldn't understand what they were talking about at all.

"The specimen is male. His age is around sixteen. He has no history, no training in Magic, and…"

"In light of our previous failure, we'll inject him with 110% of the lethal dose."

"Won't he just immediately die like before?"

The men wearing white coats talked amongst themselves.

"By the way, Ganbanzel... What is this experiment?"

"Haven't you been listening? I told you this was an experiment to test drugs that forcibly insert Magic Rights into people's brains."

"I know that, but didn't it fail just now?"

"Trial and error is important. You can't succeed by just trying once or twice."

"I think it's a waste though."

It seemed that the old man was Ganbanzel and the long-haired man was Cigal.

For the time being, Enlike could only understand from their conversation that this was an experiment and that he was the guinea pig.

The people around him talked about various things. He could hear them all, but they felt far away for some reason.

Enlike thought that he was going to die.

This was human experimentation. Meats exist for such things. Human bombs, human experimentation… The Meats were only kept alive for those kinds of things.

He didn't think it was scary.

He only thought about one thing…

*If they'll allow me… I want to try smiling just once*, Enlike thought to himself.

He tried distorting his face. As always, he raised the meat of his cheeks and lowered the corners of his eyes. But as always, he didn't manage to smile.

Even at the very end, he couldn't smile.

As he thought of this, he became very sad. Tears started leaking from Enlike's eyes.

"…What's he doing?"

Muttered the man wearing a white mask.

"What is it, Boramot?"

"I don't know. He made a strange face and then suddenly started crying."

"Hmm…"

The old man on the couch looked at Enlike with great interest.

*Let's try it again*. Enlike wiped the tears with his sleeve and tried smiling again. But he couldn't.

He couldn't do it no matter what.

Why couldn't he? Even though he made such an effort... Even though he had been desperately trying to…

"…"

Thinking about it, there was a simple answer; he had nothing that would make him smile. But, even if he understood it was useless, he still wanted to smile.

"Quite the strange Meat."

Someone muttered outside the cage.

The men wearing white coats stopped what they were doing and looked at Enlike. Confusion and hesitation started spreading around them.

"Hmm."

This voice once again leaked from the man known as Ganbanzel.

"Hey, Boramot. Bring that youngster over here."

"Bring him over? What about the drug experiment?"

The masked man asked in a surprised voice.

"It can be done later. I said to bring him over, so do it."

"Excuse me."

The masked man – apparently called Boramot – grabbed the hand of Enlike, who was still crying. And he instructed him to open the cage's door.

When the door was opened, a caretaker rushed towards Enlike all of a sudden.

"What are you doing?!"

And he hit Enlike. He then shouted at him as he collapsed.

"Why would a Meat cry like this! What… what about my passage into Heaven! I won't be able to ascend to Heaven like this!"

The caretaker shook Enlike's body. Ganbanzel looked bored as he watched this.

"Hey, Boramot. Take care of that killjoy."

Ganbanzel pointed at the caretaker with his finger.

"Yes, sir."

Boramot answered.

At that moment, Boramot's clothes suddenly began extending as far as a bed sheet. The clothes entangled around the caretaker and wrapped him as if they were living beings.

"Shall I kill him?"

"You didn't even need to ask, fool."

Boramot nodded.

There was the sound of squishing. The cloth wrapped around the man distorted. The caretaker's body must have been inside. In the blink of an eye, the cloth was dyed red.

The extending cloth shrank and returned to its original size. The caretaker's body, now looking like a squeezed rag, lay on the floor.

"What should we do with this man?"

"Throw away everything, including his soul. We can't have someone like that ascend to Heaven."

"Understood. You heard him."

Boramot pointed to the corpse in front of the men in white coats. While still confused, they took the corpse away.

Enlike had been brought by Boramot to stand before Ganbanzel.

Ganbanzel took a long look at Enlike's body.

"Hey, what have you been doing now? Don't bring a smelly Meat in front of me."

The man called Cigal – the long-haired one – said so.

"Shut up and listen. Isn't he an amusing Meat?"

"Haah, I won't play along."

Cigal shrugged and rose up. He pushed Enlike aside and strolled towards the exit.

"How convenient, you have a spot now. Youngster, come sit here."

Ganbanzel patted the place next to him on the couch. Enlike became puzzled. He never heard such kind words before.

"Do as he says."

Boramot pushed Enlike from behind. He sat next to Ganbanzel.

"So, Boramot. Have you ever seen a Meat who cried before dying?"

"I did not."

Boramot answered.

"Me neither. How interesting. Interesting, interesting. I must possess such interesting persons."

"Indeed."

The old man spoke while looking at Enlike's eyes.

"Why are you crying?"

"…I wanted to smile. But I can't. Not even once."

Enlike answered.

"To think there's a Meat who says such things… the world is truly filled with things that can't be understood."

Ganbanzel muttered while stroking his chin.

"But isn't it simple? You can smile if you enjoy something."

"I'm a Meat. I don't have such a thing."

"Hmm. Reasonable."

For a while, Ganbanzel thought of something while staring at Enlike's face.

"What is your name?"

"Enlike."

"So, Enlike. I will ask you a question. What do you think the most enjoyable thing in the world is?"

Enlike shook his head.

"I don't know."

"There are plenty of enjoyable things. Eating delicious food, drinking good alcohol, smoking or sleeping with women… But, Enlike… All of those enjoyable things boil down to the joy of living. Do you understand, Enlike?"

"I don't really understand, but I think I know what you mean."

"So, Enlike – how does one savor the joys of living?"

"I don't know."

Enlike answered. Ganbanzel spoke softly to him, as if he was his patient teacher.

"By killing. You keep living and your opponent dies. Is there any other real feeling?"

"I don't really understand. Is killing enjoyable?"

"Yes, it's enjoyable. Truly enjoyable. There is nothing more pleasing in this world other than getting stronger, defeating enemies and killing them."

Ganbanzel presented his own hands.

"Enlike, look at my hands. See how frail they are. Right now I can't even kill a child."

Ganbanzel kept speaking.

"For a long time, I was an ordinary citizen. I simply lived my life as a good man. Thinking back on it, that sort of life was unbearable. I stifled my desires and lied to

myself – what kind of life is that? Life is taking what you want. After meeting the Indulging God Cult, I finally noticed that.

However, when I found out the truth of this world, I was already old. I couldn't kill anybody with my hands, much less dream about becoming the strongest existence.

However, I had a wish. I wanted someone to make that wish come true in my stead.

I wanted to give birth to a monster by my own hands."

"A monster…"

"Right now, only the one known as Hamyuts Meseta can call herself the world's strongest. She is the strongest amongst the present day Armed Librarians, our longtime rivals. After killing her, the next strongest could reign at the top. I am looking for someone who can show me that. Enlike. Do you understand why I'm telling this to you?"

"…Will I become a monster?"

Enlike murmured. Ganbanzel nodded with satisfaction.

"It is good you understood it quickly, Enlike."

"If I become a monster, will I be able to smile?"

"Of course, Enlike. No expression will be enough to display the amount of enjoyment you will feel."

Enlike stared at Ganbanzel.

"I want to smile. I'll do anything for that."

Ganbanzel caressed Enlike's cheek and smiled sweetly.

"Boramot, I have decided. Bring him to my island. He will become a good monster."

# Chapter 4: The Self-Cutting Man, the Unkilling Fist

Zatoh came walking to Noloty. He stood in front of her and stared at her.

She felt terribly uncomfortable. His eyes looked like they were void of emotions.

"Where's Hamyuts Meseta?"

"The Director?"

"Where did she go?"

"I-I don't know. She's fickle and I can't tell what she's thinking about at all."

Zatoh slightly frowned. But he immediately walked past Noloty.

"Please wait a second."

"What is it?"

Zatoh turned around. Noloty decided that for now she would talk to him and check his situation. She tried thinking of a topic that wouldn't be sensitive for him.

"U-umm, did you quit that brawl business?"

"I don't need it anymore."

Zatoh answered this and started walking. He didn't seem to be interested in Noloty at all.

"Please wait, Zatoh-san!"

Noloty grabbed his sleeve and called to him again. His expression completely changed. She froze in place after he turned around and showed her his face. He stared at Noloty with eyes full of anger and astonishment.

"Why do you know that name?"

"The Director told me."

"…I see."

Zatoh made a displeased frown. He appeared to have some grudge towards that name.

"Do you have any business with the Director?"

After being asked so, the man thought for a bit.

"I'm going to be killed."

"…Huh?"

"I'll be killed by Hamyuts Meseta."

"Umm, pardon me. What did you say?"

"I said I'm going to be killed by Hamyuts Meseta."

Noloty was stunned to hear those words. The Director said he was being suicidal, but what was this deal about getting killed by her? It was a rather roundabout way of committing suicide.

If he wanted to die, it would be faster to just hang himself.

"Please wait. If you suddenly say such things I'll be worried. Even the Director won't kill a person without any reason."

"I said I want to die. That's enough of a reason."

"No, it's not enough at all."

"Don't touch other people's clothes."

Zatoh tried shaking off Noloty's hands. But she didn't let go easily.

"You're in my way. I must find Hamyuts Meseta."

She couldn't allow it. Just now, Hamyuts had told her that she must save this person. If the person she had to save would suddenly die she would fail the mission. She couldn't understand the situation at all, but she had to stop him.

"Please wait. I can't allow this."

This time she grabbed not his clothes but his wrists.

"Then, will you kill me?"

"…Huh?"

"You're lacking compared to Hamyuts Meseta, but that fist earlier was quite strong. I don't mind if you'd kill me."

She couldn't understand him at all. She opened her eyes wide.

"Kill me."

"…I can't."

Noloty answered. Zatoh looked annoyed.

"That's enough. You're in my way. Go away."

"Even if you tell me that…"

Zatoh tried shaking off the hands that grabbed him. Noloty desperately held on to his wrists. From a distance they may have looked like quarreling lovers.

Suddenly, something hit Noloty's foot. When she looked down, she saw a small iron bullet. She released Zatoh's wrists and picked it up.

"It's the Director's message bullet."

After opening the mass of iron, she could see a small piece of paper inside. Noloty and Zatoh looked at it.

"To Zatoh-kun – It's useless trying to look for me."

Zatoh snatched the piece of paper from Noloty's hand, tore it apart and threw it away. Then, he turned his back to Noloty and started walking in a fast pace.

"Where are you going, Zatoh-san?"

"Don't follow me."

He spat and went away.

"Even if he says not to follow him, if I do that my job's done for…"

Noloty walked around while masking her presence. She was walking more than 200 meters behind Zatoh, choosing places she could hide in if he were to turn around. She knew the basics of tailing after someone. Even if following someone alone was hard, a single target shouldn't be able to feel her if it was an ordinary person.

She decided to gather information about him. She had to take such an action in this state where she couldn't understand anything about Zatoh. It seemed that for some reason, he wants to die. Furthermore, it seemed like he wants to get killed by someone else rather than hang or drown himself.

What's going on with Zatoh? She had to investigate this first and foremost.

Zatoh left the downtown area and passed by the pier. He was heading towards the warehouse district; due to it being night, there were no people around.

He stopped in front of an especially old and small warehouse, opened the rusty iron door and then went inside.

"Mm…"

Noloty was anxious about entering that warehouse alone, but she couldn't just give up here either. She looked for a place she could sneak through while staying undetected.

She found the vents on the other side of the warehouse near the roof. She climbed up the stone wall and got inside.

Fortunately, it was dark inside. Noloty had no problems because she could see in the dark, and she wouldn't be found by those inside. Being careful not to make any sound, she silently descended down the wall. Infiltration successful.

The inside was dusty and apparently hadn't been used in a long time. Noloty thought she will have to be careful not to sneeze or cough. Inside the warehouse was a large pile of cloth sacks. Judging from the smell, this warehouse seemed to be storing coal.

Noloty put her ears to the ground. She could hear the sound of her own heartbeats as well as the footsteps of just one person from the other side of the warehouse. Other than that she couldn't hear even mice on the floor. For the time being, she thought that only she and Zatoh were inside this warehouse.

Noloty gently poked her head from behind the sacks of coals. There was a small space in the corner of the other side of the warehouse. There, Zatoh was rubbing a matchstick and then used it to light a lamp.

His figure was illuminated. Around him were just a single lamp, a shabby sleeping bag, and a small satchel. Seeing he had a sleeping bag there, this was probably the place he slept in. Since Zatoh should have made some money by getting beaten like she saw earlier, Noloty couldn't understand why he would sleep in such a place. Was there some reason he couldn't go to an inn?

Zatoh took something out of his satchel. When the lamp's light was reflected on it, she could see that it was a short sword. He grabbed the blade in a backhand grip and suddenly stabbed the back of his hand.

"!"

Noloty barely restrained herself from making a sound. The thirty-centimeter blade was buried up to its middle. The blade dug into the bare ground through the back of his hand.

Zatoh pulled the sword out. It was covered in blood, and he once again lowered it. He stabbed himself in the same spot. The pain of having stabbed himself in the same spot twice wasn't insignificant at all. Zatoh seemed to be bearing it since he widened his eyes and clenched his teeth.

When he lowered the sword for the third time, it wasn't to the back of his hand. He pierced the middle of his chest through his ribs.

"…Ah."

Normally, when stabbing your chest you would turn the blade horizontally. However, Zatoh simply buried the blade inside him as it pierced his chest. Noloty felt as if she

could hear the sound of his ribs breaking from where she was. Even from that distance, she could understand the broken ribs and blade pierced his heart and lungs.

Zatoh coughed violently. Blood flew from his mouth.

He grabbed the sword that was covered in blood up to the handle with both hands. While sprinkling blood from his mouth, he next pierced his throat with the blade.

He undoubtedly died. Whether or not he strengthened his body with Magic, there was nothing he could do. He didn't even have the time to stop since it was so sudden.

"…Oh no…"

Noloty muttered. She suddenly failed her mission.

There was no need to hide anymore. Noloty raised her body and walked towards Zatoh's corpse.

His body, collapsed forward as if he were prostrating, was vainly lit up by the lamp. When Noloty stepped into the fresh blood she could feel it was still warm. Even while she understood it was useless, she reached for Zatoh's body. Then, she suddenly looked at his left hand.

"Huh?"

There no wound on his hand. Thinking that perhaps it was his right hand instead, she went around Zatoh to look at it. Suddenly, she heard a voice.

"…What are you doing?"

Noloty started looking around her reflexively.

The voice she heard surely came from Zatoh at her feet, but she couldn't believe a man who just died could speak.

"…As I thought, it's you."

Zatoh raised his body from the sea of blood. His face, dyed red by his own blood, looked at Noloty.

Noloty lost her words. Zatoh still being alive after having pierced his heart and trachea seemed impossible to her.

Only one person had such an ability.

It was the Monster that attacked Bantorra Library.

Zatoh turned his blood-covered face towards Noloty after getting up.

"What are you doing?"

He angrily asked. He didn't seem to be in pain. He couldn't possibly be a man who just shoved a sword into his heart and neck. Even his left hand didn't have any wounds anymore.

"Because you went after me, I thought you intended on killing me. But you just wasted that chance to watch me… why?"

*I was busted*, Noloty thought.

She thought about escaping. If Zatoh is the Monster she couldn't handle him by herself. She needed to escape and then call for assistance.

Her reason called her to do that. Strangely, however, her feet couldn't move.

Why was that?

Even if he had the same ability, it wasn't enough evidence to say Zatoh truly was the Monster.

Besides, she didn't feel any hostility from him. Noloty couldn't feel any intentions of an attack coming from him. She could feel in one way or another that this man only wished to hurt himself.

Zatoh picked up the short sword that fell into the sea of blood.

"Oh well. I'll just try it again. This time I won't fail."

"Huh?"

Noloty raised a bewildered voice.

"I'll stab my heart and neck again. Once I have fallen, I'll keep doing it until my regeneration can't keep up. Then I will die."

After saying this, Zatoh directed the short sword to his chest. Noloty grabbed his hands.

"Wai- Please wait!"

"Why?"

"Don't just keep talking by yourself."

"…"

"U-umm, I didn't come to kill you. Please wait with that whole suicide business."

Once again, Zatoh looked angry.

"Then why are you here?"

Noloty hesitated a little.

"I wanted to save you."

When Noloty said this, a strange atmosphere enveloped her as if the air was torn apart. She knew this kind of feeling. It was the atmosphere of facing the anger of an overwhelmingly strong person.

"Save me?"

"Yes."

"So it's simple. Kill me. The only way of saving me is to kill me."

"…That doesn't count as saving at all."

"Please don't say something like suicide is wrong and I shouldn't do it."

Noloty desperately focused her eyes on him as if to not get overwhelmed, and answered.

"Suicide is wrong and you shouldn't do it."

A shiver ran through her spine. She felt as if his stare was physically assaulting her.

"I advise you to go away while I'm still calm."

Noloty thought that would perhaps be best. However, she stopped herself from following his advice. If she would withdraw here, why did she come in the first place?

*Everything's fine,* Noloty encouraged herself. She could still stop him. Her superiors were far scarier. Compared to them she can't be afraid of this person.

"What are you doing? If you're going away do it quickly."

Zatoh said angrily.

"Choose quickly. Will you kill me, or will you scram?"

"If I tell you I want neither, what will you do?"

Zatoh sighed. And he seemed to become even angrier.

"What do you think I'll do?"

"I don't know. I'm not very smart."

*Don't avert your eyes*. Noloty thought this while the two of them glared at one another.

"Tell me just one thing. Who are you?"

Zatoh thought for a while, averting his gaze from Noloty.

"I'm just a fool."

After saying so, he fell silent. Noloty also didn't know what to say and stayed silent.

If this were a battle, this situation would be like the both of them were stuck in a stalemate as they waited for each other's moves. Since Noloty didn't want to kill him but Zatoh wanted to die, they were incompatible. It was a battle conducted with something other than physical violence.

The slender lamp illuminated the both of them. They could hear the roars of the sea from afar. Since the unceasing cries of the seagulls were not heard anymore, they probably went back to roost already.

Noloty stared at the person in front of her as if ascertaining him.

*Is this person the Monster? If he is, why is he here, and why does he want to die? And if he isn't the Monster, who is he?*

"Why did you come here?"

Zatoh asked. Noloty didn't answer.

"Is it a mission from Hamyuts Meseta?"

Bull's-eye. Noloty's face stiffened. Seeing her face, Zatoh further questioned her.

"What's Hamyuts Meseta trying to do?"

"I don't know. I'm just a subordinate."

"What's your mission?"

"…I don't really know. I just need to save you, that's all."

"Anyway, it seems like you weren't told…"

Zatoh's eyes twinkled. Noloty could feel a pressure that wasn't there before.

"About me being the Monster."

Once again, a shiver ran down her spine. Her entire body became tense. Her feet screamed for her to run away.

"Does an Armed Librarian trainee intend to save the Monster that attacked Bantorra Library?"

"…Are you the Monster?"

Noloty replied.

"I've said it just now. I'm the Monster you guys are looking for."

Zatoh said resolutely.

There was not a doubt anymore. Her secret mission or whatever didn't matter. She has to kill him. Or if not, escape. Flee, call for reinforcements and kill this man. This was the rational decision. It was the natural course of action.

But why was it that Noloty couldn't move?

She could smell the scent of some lie in Zatoh's words. She was bothered by something. She felt like something didn't fit.

In the battle between her reason and feelings, her feelings won.

"…Thinking about it, you thought I came here to kill you, right?"

"What?"

"There's a lot to think about. Certainly, if you're the Monster, you need to be killed, but…

I'm not naïve enough to be fooled by such a lie."

"What are you talking about?"

Noloty talked while desperately trying not to let her voice shake.

"I'm saying that you're lying."

Zatoh ground his teeth. He was trying to suppress the anger that nearly reached its boiling point with reason.

"Stop saying those stupid irresponsible things. That's enough. Kill me already."

*Aah, as I thought*, Noloty thought to herself. *He's bad at lying*.

"If you were the Monster, you would have killed me long ago. Why would a person like that, who invaded Bantorra Library and killed some people, suddenly hesitate about killing me?"

Noloty clearly confirmed that Zatoh became slightly flustered by her words.

"I seek death. Killing you holds no meaning for me."

"If I were to die, plenty of my seniors from the Library would come here. People such as the Director or Mattalast-san will gang up on you.

Wouldn't it be easier that way?"

"…"

"'Kill me because I'm the Monster'. If that's what you want to say, you should have just attacked the Director and me without saying anything since the very beginning. Am I wrong?"

Zatoh downcast his face and went silent for a while. He then raised it.

"I see. I didn't think of that."

*Oh no*, Noloty thought.

*Maybe I've made a huge mistake.*

"Let's try it then."

Zatoh extended one hand towards Noloty. She fled backwards. She crashed into the pile of coal bags, which then collapsed and went down on her. While knowing this would happen, she had no choice.

The floor where Noloty stood before was burnt. Zatoh's body began emitting sparks inside the dark warehouse.

This was also the Monster's ability she heard about from Mirepoc. Lightning.

"Stupid woman."

Saying so, Zatoh reached towards Noloty who was buried under the sacks of coal. Noloty mustered her entire body's strength to stand up. She flung the sack on top of her towards Zatoh.

He lightly avoided the sack that came flying at him. However, she was able to buy enough time to roll towards the warehouse's edge. Noloty stood up and turned around.

"…Don't move."

Once again, Zatoh's hand shone with a blue light. Noloty immediately ran to the side. She would never be able to dodge the attack based on her sight. She had to move around and hope for good luck. She couldn't do anything else.

She barely dodged the second lightning strike. Sacks of coal burst open and rained on Noloty.

"I told you not to move."

Zatoh's lightning struck the place at the warehouse's entrance. Just before her body touched the door, it was wrapped in lightning and its hinge was blown off. Noloty dodged the collapsing door.

She didn't manage to run away, but the door being open was a blessing in disguise.

After somehow avoiding the lightning strikes several times, she started running towards the exit-

And then, she noticed.

*Several times?*

*What have I been avoiding in the first place? Are my physical abilities so good that I can avoid lightning strikes coming at the speed of light? Only someone like Mattalast-san should be able to avoid them using his Prediction.*

Zatoh's hand glowed, and the next lightning strike came.

However, Noloty didn't avoid it.

The lightning flew at her. This deadly attack hit in the distance of a meter from where Noloty was standing. Some sparks burnt Noloty's bare feet, but that was all.

"…"

Zatoh went silent.

He didn't send another attack. Nothing. He didn't intend on hitting her from the very beginning. He opened the door with his lightning and tried to make her run away.

"…How kind of you."

Noloty said.

Zatoh embarrassedly turned his eyes away.

"I can't think of you as the Monster at all. How did you manage to have such a drastic change of heart in just a month?"

"That's enough. Just run away from here."

"And what should I do when I run away?"

"Call another Armed Librarian here. It can be Hamyuts Meseta or anyone else."

"Are you still saying that? There should be a limit to being stubborn."

Then, Zatoh stared at Noloty with terribly serious eyes.

"You're the stubborn one, Noloty."

"Me?"

Zatoh nodded.

"Why won't you kill me? There should be plenty of reasons. I called myself a Monster and attacked you. Even that should be enough to kill me.

You mustered your courage, made things hard for yourself again and again, but you still won't kill me. Is your mission of saving me such an important thing?"

Now, it was Noloty who didn't know what to say. What he said was true. She desperately searched for a reason not to kill him.

It was because Hamyuts had given her that mission. No, that wasn't it. She answered,

"I just don't like it.

Why are you only thinking about killing and whatnot?

Is something troubling you? That's why you want to die and think that you have to? I told you I will save you. Or do you think I can help you if you don't say anything?"

"…"

"This isn't a matter of you wanting to die or me killing you, right?"

"That's enough."

Zatoh said.

"I've had it with you. I'll get killed by someone else."

"Zatoh-san!"

"Don't talk to me."

The lamp was broken by Zatoh's lightning. As the slight flame that remained went off, the warehouse was wrapped in darkness.

*I probably can't do anything here anymore.* Noloty turned her back to Zatoh.

"…I'll come again."

"And do what?"

"I don't know. But if I won't come, I can't make anything happen."

"Aren't you afraid of me?"

"…More importantly,"

Noloty asked finally,

"Why didn't you kill me?"

She didn't receive any answer. But when Noloty left the warehouse, she could faintly hear a voice coming from within the darkness.

"…Because I have killed too many people already."

Noloty returned to the sheriff's offices which were already empty. She sat on the sofa, put the newspaper on her knees and started thinking.

Who is this Zatoh?

*Thinking about it plainly, he's the Monster. He possesses the same abilities and admitted himself of being the Monster. However, he's far too gentle for it.*

*What am I going to do now? Even without this top secret mission, I have to save him.*

*But if he's really the Monster, I'm essentially betraying the Library.*

Should she save him or not? Should she follow Hamyuts's orders or… Noloty worried about those things.

Suddenly, a voice echoed inside her head.

'Noloty, can you hear me?'

It was the Thought Sharing coming from Mirepoc, Noloty's direct superior. Noloty took a piece of colored cloth from her back pocket in a hurry. This small banner, woven with Mirepoc's hairs, was a Magic Tool designed to aid Thought Sharing. Without it, Noloty couldn't send back her thoughts.

'I hear you.'

'I see. Because you're far, we can't keep this up for a long time. What about Luimon's Book?'

Thinking about it, her current mission was the search for Luimon's Book. Because she was so preoccupied with Zatoh's matters, she forgot about it.

Frankly speaking about her current situation, she should probably back off the top secret mission, Noloty thought.

But thinking about it, Zatoh said he was the one who stole the Book. Whether or not it was true, she should at least report that now.

'I found some suspicious person. I'm focusing on him.'

'Great work.'

Mirepoc's calm surprise was transmitted. She probably thought Noloty couldn't resolve it on her own.

'However, I still can't fully grasp the situation. I don't have enough information yet. I'll report when I know more.'

'Does it seem like the Book can be recovered?'

'I still don't know. I found the person who stole it, but as for the Book's presence…'

'I see. I'm sure you know this, but the retrieval of the Book is your top priority. Do you understand?'

'Yes ma'am.'

She couldn't answer that it was far from being so. If she were to say it, Mirepoc would come flying there from Bantorra in a rage.

'I will also investigate the background of the crime.'

'…You don't have to do that.'

'Huh?'

'Please kill him.'

Noloty gasped.

'We'll know the truth at the Library. There's no need to keep him alive.'

'…'

Noloty didn't know what to say. She couldn't just agree with that order.

'So you're hesitating.'

Mirepoc's disappointment was transmitted through.

'I want you to realize already that your naiveté is inhibiting your growth.'

'…That's…'

'…I'm expecting a good report.'

This was the limit of Mirepoc's ability. The Thought Sharing was cut off there. Noloty collapsed on the sofa and sighed deeply.

"Why are they all so focused on killing?"

Noloty clenched her fist and struck the sofa. Then, she stared at that fist.

Suddenly, she recalled the time when Luimon Mahaton was still alive.

Until half a year ago, Noloty's training instructor had been Luimon. Mirepoc replaced him after his death.

"Why don't you have a gun?"

Luimon said this to her a long time ago.

"Your fighting ability isn't lacking. You're definitely already stronger than me."

Saying this, Luimon pointed at Noloty with his index finger. He lightly flipped his finger as if shooting.

"But you don't have any sword or a gun."

Luimon's weapon was a rifle with a bayonet. His giant body and physical strength allowed him to lightly handle this weapon which was too big to wield normally. Compared to that, Noloty's only weapons were her fists wrapped in straw rope.

Currently, many Armed Librarians used both guns and swords. A sword for when they were close, and a gun for when they were far.

Almost all of them were like that, except for people like Mattalast who specialized in a single weapon or people like Hamyuts who possessed special abilities. Noloty did not choose this extremely reasonable fighting style.

Instead, she chose the most irrational style - melee combat with her fists.

"I hate guns."

Noloty answered Luimon's question.

"Why?"

"Because they kill excessively. Even if you don't want to kill someone, you may end up doing that."

"You're such a kind girl."

While saying so, Luimon seemed to be worried.

"However, defeating enemies without killing them is several times harder than killing them. It requires being several times stronger and smarter, which you are not right now."

Noloty didn't say anything. He was absolutely right.

"Our job is, after all, managing death. We change the present into the past and contain the past as the past. Saving people is due to our morals, not our duty. We might get blamed for not killing people, but we will not be praised for it.

Even so, can you say with confidence that you don't want to kill people?"

"Yes."

Luimon sighed.

"Perhaps you shouldn't become an Armed Librarian. I have the feeling your convictions will someday be fatal for you."

"…Even so, I'll work hard. Until I can win without killing."

As Noloty answered so, Luimon gazed at her worriedly.

She recalled those events now.

"Why won't you kill me?"

Zatoh had asked her.

Even Noloty could understand – the best solution was to kill him.

If he's the Monster, he must be killed. She could look for Luimon's Book afterwards. Because he belonged to the Indulging God Cult, Zatoh's Book will not be found, but he must still be killed first and foremost.

Any reasons to follow Hamyuts's orders were already slim.

If Hamyuts issued her orders while not knowing he was the Monster, her orders would become null and void. If she passed orders while she did know of it, Hamyuts would be the one to be held responsible.

And even if, say, Zatoh wasn't the Monster, since he himself admitted on being the Monster, there shouldn't be any problem killing him.

He must be killed. There was no other option.

But even so, Noloty didn't want to kill people.

"I have killed too many people already."

Noloty recalled Zatoh's words. Zatoh didn't try killing himself. Even though it would have been much more convenient for him than being killed. Still, he didn't kill himself. She noticed she had some affinity to him.

Noloty was determined.

She wasn't afraid of angering people. She also wasn't afraid of getting fired.

While betting on her convictions, she will save that person. Noloty silently vowed this.

At the same time on the dark road. Zatoh left the coal warehouse and was walking in the city on his own. Since it was already late at night, it would be difficult finding another suitable place to lodge in.

Zatoh already stripped his blood-smeared clothes and changed. Even though he found a cheap hotel, he didn't plan on staying there. He didn't sleep in the warehouse because he had no money; it was because he could relax better in that sort of place.

Suddenly, Zatoh stopped walking. He stared at his hand.

That hand was trembling. It wasn't normal. It trembled violently like the death throes of a dying insect.

"Again?"

Zatoh said. He felt this trembling when Noloty was tailing him and when he returned to the warehouse.

Stabbing himself like before would be inconvenient. He won't be able to stay at a hotel if he were to scatter blood like that. Zatoh grabbed his convulsing pinky and twisted it backwards. A terribly dry sound resounded from his hand's bones. It was the sound of bones cracking. He clenched his teeth at this pain that felt like it assaulted him from head to toe.

Although he broke one bone, his hand's convulsions didn't stop. He twisted his ring finger next. He bent the joints on his finger one by one such that they took the shape of a spiral.

When he touched his middle finger, the convulsions finally subsided. If he gave himself pain, the trembling would stop. The pain came out of his body and he sent it away.

The bones began regenerating. As he watched it happen, Zatoh thought,

*The interval between each trembling is becoming shorter.*

"I must die as soon as possible."

He muttered.

# Chapter 4: Second Past – Lightning

Three years have passed since Enlike met Ganbanzel.

There were about ten boys on a sandy beach with seagulls flying ahead and crabs crawling around.

They were all clad in the same kind of worn-out military uniforms. Everyone was sitting on the beach with even intervals between them. The one sitting at the very end was Enlike.

The sounds of waves on this windless day sounded pleasant to his ears. Sometimes, this sort of moderate background noise sharpened people's minds better than silence. The waves extended all the way to Enlike's knees and slightly wet his trousers.

He closed his eyes, listened and kept calming his breath. He focused his consciousness on the axioms flowing through him.

"Imagine it."

A man stood behind Enlike's group.

He was a middle-aged man wearing a military uniform that was slightly higher-quality than theirs. The lower half of his face was concealed by a curly black beard, and the upper half was covered by a quirky black hair. Looking at his face, one could only see small parts of his eyes and nose. The man's name was Boramot Mafe. He was the cloth controller that once stood by Ganbanzel's side.

Adding his large build, he looked like a clothed bear from afar.

"Magic begins from your mental image. You need to destroy the order of the world inside you, while at the same time destroying your order inside the world. With the power of imagination you can give shape to the chaos inside your consciousness."

Listening to Boramot's words, Enlike enhanced his concentration.

Enlike's group was learning about Magic now.  It was so they could turn into monsters just like Ganbanzel said.

What was Magic? In order to explain, Boramot first presented them with a glass full of seawater. This was quite soon after Enlike came to the island. When he arrived, there were already several dozens of boys there. He was the last one.

"If I were to tilt this glass, what would happen to the water inside?"

"It would spill."

One in Enlike's group said.

"Why?"

"…Because it's just like that?"

"Please explain in more detail."

The boy faltered, and thus Boramot kept talking.

"It is because it was established as such in this world. Tilting the glass would make the water spill. Letting go of the glass would make it fall. Birds fly in the sky, fish swim in the sea, the sun rises every morning and sinks every night.

In the past, the Overseer of the Beginning and the End established the world like that when He created it. Everything in this world was made according to those principles. No, it would be better saying that the section made to be that way by the Creator Deity is the world.

As humans were also made by the Creator Deity, they obviously operate under those principles as well.

Therefore, no matter how strong humans are, they can't lift a boulder weighing a ton, and no matter how good they are at swimming, they can't swim faster than fish. They can't produce light from their hands or breathe fire. It is natural. The Creator Deity made humans this way.

Fundamentally humans are just a bit smart but have no abilities. However, this isn't everything about them."

Boramot talked while presenting the glass of water to Enlike's group.

"The Creator Deity made humans to be the sole existence in this world that could defy His established principles.

The right to defy the Creator Deity;

A deviation from the axioms organizing the world;

Those are what humans refer to as Magic. Tilting this glass would make the water inside spill... but that kind of rule can also be negated. Like this-"

After saying so, Boramot muttered something under his breath and turned over the glass in his hand. The water inside had stuck to the inside of the glass as if it were ice.

"It isn't difficult at this level. Anyone can do this if they were trained to some extent. And the phenomenon itself isn't a big deal, because if I want to keep the water from spilling, I could simply cover the glass."

Then, the water that was stuck inside the glass spilled on the sand as if it suddenly lost its support.

"The Magic you brats need is something like this."

This time, Boramot's clothes started shuffling around noisily as if they were alive. The boys started getting alarmed, but Enlike wasn't surprised. He saw him crush a caretaker on the ship using this.

"This is my ability. Magic that allows me to freely control clothes in contact with my skin. Even I wanted to teach this, it cannot be learned. I am the only one with the right to use this power. 'Boramot Mafe can manipulate any cloth he touches at will, surpassing the laws of physics' – I thus overturned the world's principles.

Currently almost all of those who are first-class warriors can control this kind of Magic. This is a Magic that only I can use and nobody else.

Even you brats must learn it. Right now, this is the best method for you."

"…"

"By the way, it is extremely rare, but there are people who are granted a Right from God while they are born. Those kinds of people are also born with unnatural hair colors.

For example, there's the famous Ever-Laughing Witch who had striped hair… but well, this doesn't have anything to do with you brats."

Boramot continued.

"Remember that you are all here only so you can become of use for Ganbanzel-sama. You were kept alive only for his noble purposes. You are nothing more than that. Do not forget this.

I'm strict. But I'm doing this for Ganbanzel-sama and not only for you. If you are able to acquire powerful Magic, you will become monsters. The most important thing is for you to produce something noble and thus become noble.

But until that day comes, you are all trash. I will not allow you to talk back to me. Is that understood?!"

Everyone, including Enlike, nodded in unison.

Ever since that day, the group started their Magic Deliberation.

Enlike, while sitting on the sand, kept sharpening his focus.

He shut himself out to shield his consciousness from the outside world. He connected his subconscious with the Present God inside and led his consciousness to the deepest parts.

In his mind, he started reciting the words of the Magic Deliberation he learned from Boramot.

'Those who go will not go, and those who come will not come. The moon is the sun. Birds are fish. Living beings become corpses. Steel becomes weak. All of reality becomes dreams, and illusions become all of reality. Existent things cease existing, nonexistent things exist, everything is defined as false, and thus I undergo the Magic Deliberation.'

The Magic Deliberation began.

Enlike pushed his way through his deep consciousness, held his intentions and began rewriting the axioms of the world. He started eroding the axioms governed by the Present God like how carnivorous insects would feast on their prey, and then rewrote them according to his own wishes.

'Enlike Bishile controls lightning.'

'Enlike Bishile controls even stronger lightning.'

'Enlike Bishile controls even stronger and more precise lightning.'

While chanting this inside his mind, Enlike changed the principles of the world. He imagined his Magic to be stronger and more precise. As he imagined it, he started turning it real.

He changed the world's axioms. The Magic Deliberation ended.

Enlike opened his eyes and stretched out his hand. Together with that action, a blue flash came surging out from his hand. About five meters ahead from him on the sandy beach, a cloud of dust rose where the flash pierced it.

"…"

Enlike sighed in relief among the swirling sand. The power he used was lightning. He could freely emit it from his body and control it.

Coming this far wasn't easy.

It all started from imagining himself shooting lightning. He materialized that image and refined it. And he believed from the bottom of his heart in bringing forth this lightning. Discarding his hesitation and grasping the world's axioms in his hands took him a year.

It took him another year until he could freely control that lightning. When he couldn't control it, he burnt his own body again and again. Being able to use it like this to attack was a recent development. Since then, he repeated the Magic Deliberation countless of times to improve his precision and power.

The boys around him opened their eyes. They directed startled looks towards Enlike and the traces of his lightning.

"So you raised your power further."

Boramot said and gave a piece of cloth to Enlike. He wiped the sweat and sand on his face.

"Lightning, huh… such an amazing ability. Trying to master it is hell, but once you can use it you will unleash this hell upon your enemies."

Boramot looked at Enlike's body. Never mind his fingers or arms, there were also burn marks all over his body that was concealed under his clothes. He went through the danger of dying countless times.

"You have done well to survive this far."

Boramot clapped on Enlike's shoulder.

"This is enough for today. Everyone rise."

Enlike and the rest of the group stood up. It was already close to sunset.

Every day they conducted their Deliberation like this and strengthened their Magic. The only one who was able to complete the Deliberation and strengthen the power of his Magic today was Enlike.

"Enlike's progress lately has been remarkable. However, the rest of you slackers make me want to cover my eyes. Do you have no shame?"

All of the boys other than Enlike lowered their gazes.

"Do not forget you have been left alive by Ganbanzel-sama. In exchange for your lives you should all have enough guts to acquire Magic. We're done for today."

After finishing the training, Boramot walked alone to a house located inside the forest. None have followed him. Boramot had said that the status of those who were Meats, like Enlike and the rest, and his, as a False Man who served Ganbanzel, was different. Boramot lived inside a wooden cabin that was built when they first arrived on the island. The residences allocated for Enlike's group were caverns on the cliffs.

With only a lamp and beds inside, it looked like a dwelling from the Paradise Era.

Enlike had no issues with that treatment. It was unexpected for him, who previously had to pick up bread crumbs from the ground, to get such a promotion.

"Is it over for today?"

One in the group mumbled.

"We're just going to eat and sleep now."

Someone answered him.

Enlike's group returned in front of the cave. On that cliff, which had holes here and there as if it was cheese, there was a small plaza. At its center a small bonfire was burning. A lone girl was tossing firewood inside one at a time.

She was around seventeen years old. She was a petite girl that could only reach up to Enlike's chest. Two braids of hair were hanging from her small head.

"We're back, Qumola."

One in the group raised his voice towards her. The girl turned around and greeted Enlike's group with a timid voice.

"Good work, everyone."

Her name was Qumola. She was a maid on this island from before Enlike came there.

Enlike and the rest sat around the bonfire in a circle. Qumola moved quickly around the center. One by one, the group received oil paper-wrapped packages around the size of a Book from her. After she finished distributing the packages, she started giving them boiled water inside iron glasses.

"Once in a while we should eat something different."

Someone's voice was heard inside the circle. Because everyone thought so, no one answered.

The group's meal was a military ration of beans and flour kneaded together. Chewing it inside their mouths, together with its half-baked saltiness, it tasted terrible. If Qumola hadn't given them hot water, they wouldn't have been able to eat it.

Finally, she put boiled water in front of Enlike. Then, she went to seat in a small distance outside the circle.

As if on cue, one of the people in the group started speaking.

The one talking was a tall boy called Kayas. He was the youth who had the most lively voice and expressions among them. He naturally ended up becoming the group's leader.  Kayas began the usual greetings in a jesting tone.

"Well then, good work for today. Our meal tastes like crap but let's eat it to our heart's content, you bastards!"

As if in response to Kayas's joking words, everyone started eating.

While eating, everyone began chatting with one another.

Conversation topics for them weren't numerous. The main topic was of course fighting. Today they talked about one of their friends, a boy named Lonkenny.

"I still think there's a defect in your ability."

Kayas said.

"Me too."

Joined a boy called Sasari.

"Mm, is that so?"

Lonkenny answered bashfully. He was a slightly introverted boy.

The Magic he used was controlling fire. He could ignite a powerful flame inside his mouth and shoot it out in the form of a fireball. It had tremendous power; he could thoroughly burn a large tree with one blow.

"It doesn't matter how much power you have if you can't hit. You have to shoot it faster."

Kayas said to Lonkenny while eating his disgusting military ration.

"Right. There's also the range. You have to make it go far."

Sasari added.

"…Yeah, I'm trying my best."

"Anyway, you have to alter your thinking itself."

"Exactly."

As Kayas and Sasari kept talking, all the others joined them in criticizing Lonkenny's abilities as they pleased. He looked down in embarrassment but listened to his friends.

Among them, only Enlike hadn't said anything. He kept chewing his military ration in silence.

"What do you think, Enlike?"

Kayas casually passed the conversation to Enlike.

At that moment, the relaxed atmosphere suddenly became tense. The gaze directed at Enlike was different than the ones exchanged among the group of comrades. He was instead met with fear, awe, and a slightly concealed killing intent.

"I don't think anything."

Enlike, receiving the others' gaze in silence, answered just this.

"How unusual to hear Enlike talk."

Sasari shrugged. He sent a hostile look towards him.

"Even a prodigy killer will answer if you'll speak to him."

"Stop that, Sasari."

Kayas tried keeping Sasari, who provoked Enlike, in check.

"Shuddup, Kayas."

"I'm telling you to stop."

This time, the dispute began between the two of them. Enlike didn't get involved. He just stayed silent and kept chewing mechanically.

Among the group of ten or so boys, he was the least talkative and the strongest. He also loved killing and battles more than anyone else – this was how the group evaluated Enlike. This evaluation wasn't favorable in the least. They have feared and alienated him.

Enlike had spent his days in a detached manner as if he didn't feel the gazes of fear directed at him.

The idle talk kept after this, and mealtime was almost over.

"Well, thanks for the meal."

Kayas was the first to finish eating. He still had some leftovers in his hands. He threw them on the cloth lying next to the bonfire.

"Here, Qumola."

Following him, the rest also threw the leftovers on the cloth.

"Me too."

"Thanks for the meal."

Small leftovers, none of them larger than a single bite, were placed on the cloth.

When everyone except Enlike finished eating, Kayas pinched the four corners of the cloth and picked it up. He brought it to Qumola who sat at the edge of the circle.

"Here, Qumola. It's your share."

"Thank you for always, everyone."

She quickly lowered her head and received the package. Then, while she was sipping the remaining hot water from a ladle, she began eating the leftovers everyone gathered for her.

Enlike kept looking at their actions while thinking they were strange.

He couldn't remember when this started.

At some point they gave their leftovers to Qumola like this, and it became a habit.

While looking at Qumola who pinched the food and continued eating, Enlike swallowed his last bite.

Even after the meal, the group kept chatting together until the bonfire would run out. Only Enlike kept silent inside the circle. He didn't join the conversation nor did he listen to it; he simply stayed silent. Nobody turned their eyes towards him.

Their conversation topics were incredibly silly. The weather, the sea, their friends, and Qumola.

Enlike felt extremely uncomfortable. He couldn't understand why those guys that were talking in front of him could be so calm. What will come out of getting along? Was there any value to this fake harmony? Eventually, everyone will die and they'll stay alone.

While thinking so, Enlike stared at the group with gloomy eyes.

Before long, the bonfire went off and they started gradually getting up. Enlike rose listlessly.

"Hey, Lonkenny. Think a bit more about your Deliberation tomorrow."

Kayas started saying.

"I know, Kayas. I'm working hard."

Lonkenny smiled bashfully. Enlike then approached him from behind.

"Lonkenny."

Lonkenny flinched at the sudden voice directed to him.

"…Enlike."

He muttered in a fearful tone.

"Tonight. Me and you."

Enlike said only this and immediately left.

Lonkenny looked at him with his legs trembling. Without paying attention to him, Enlike went inside the cave which was like his bedroom.

"It can't be… after this… but then…"

He could faintly hear Lonkenny muttering so.

It was during the middle of night, when the full moon rose high in the heavens. Enlike and Lonkenny sneaked away from the cave. The two stood on the beach and faced each other. The distance between them was about three meters. The moon's light was bright, so they could clearly see each other's faces.

"Boramot is late."

Enlike said. His face was completely expressionless. He calmly looked directly at Lonkenny as if he was staring at the deep darkness.

"…Enlike."

Lonkenny was looking at the sand with bloodshot eyes. His eyes were like this after crying until he tired of it. In contrast with Enlike, he wasn't calm at all.

"What?"

"Aren't you afraid?"

"I'm not."

"…I'm afraid."

"I see."

Enlike replied as if not answering at all. He then looked towards the direction of Boramot's hut. He thought about going to call him, but immediately decided against it.

"I don't want to do this. I don't care about Hamyuts Meseta at all."

"I see."

"I want… I want to stay with everyone."

Enlike calmly answered.

"That's impossible."

"…Impossible?"

"Yes. If you won't become a monster you'll just die."

Enlike stated a simple fact indifferently. His way of speaking was unbelievably blunt.

Lonkenny abruptly raised his face.

"Enlike, do you enjoy killing?"

Enlike thought for a while before answering.

"Don't you enjoy it?"

Lonkenny shook his head.

"It's not fun at all."

"I see."

The two went silent again.

*More importantly, Boramot is late,* Enlike thought. *Should we just start without waiting for him?*

Just as this crossed his mind, Lonkenny suddenly drew closer.

"Hey, Enlike. Will you please take this?"

Lonkenny put a hand inside his breast pocket. Enlike was slightly confused about what he pulled out. It was a seashell. A shiny scarlet seashell of the sort that could be seen from time to time on the beach.

"I don't need it."

"It's not for you. Can you pass it to Qumola?"

"Qumola?"

Enlike just became more confused.

"Please. This will really be my only regret."

Enlike received the seashell without any real interest.

"I wonder if I could have lived more comfortably if I became a killer like you."

Lonkenny muttered. Then, they heard a voice.

"So you came. We will begin immediately."

Boramot was walking on the beach.

"Let us commence the battle training."

From time to time, under the moonlight, when everyone was asleep, these kinds of matches between two comrades would occur.

On paper, they were battle training. However, in actuality it was harvesting of the strong. Those with weak abilities or low potential would be erased, thereby giving experience to the strong. This was the method devised by Boramot.

"Begin."

Boramot said while grinning. Enlike's body scattered blue sparks. A red flame lit up inside Lonkenny's mouth.

Enlike washed his hands in seawater. They were slightly burned. He popped his blisters and washed them with salt water. He scrubbed his wounds with salt while slightly wincing due to the pain. His hands were burnt by his own lightning.

"Once again, this wasn't even practice for you, Enlike."

Boramot raised his voice while smiling.

The match was over in an instant. Enlike's lightning bore into Lonkenny's body before he was able to shoot a single fireball from his mouth.

After getting hit by lightning, the fireball inside his mouth exploded and blew his head to pieces.

The difference in battle strength was overwhelming. Speed, accuracy, destructive power… Enlike had exceeded Lonkenny's power in all categories.

"Indeed, if I want to make you gain some battle experience this won't be enough. Maybe we should try two against one next time?"

Boramot manipulated his clothes and threw Lonkenny's body into the sea. It drifted away and was soon out of sight.

"It doesn't matter."

Enlike answered indifferently.

"Didn't make you bat an eyelid, huh? Really, even I had goose-bumps while just watching from the side. It's like you were born to kill."

Boramot smiled happily as he said so.

Enlike had already won four of these matches. Nowadays it felt as if everything was only a hunt for him.

"Well, you can go back to sleep. There's always tomorrow."

While wiping his hands on his pants, Enlike said to Boramot,

"Boramot. I want to see the Book about Hamyuts again."

While looking uncomfortable, Boramot beckoned to Enlike with his finger.

Enlike tread upon Boramot's log cabin. He had a warm-looking cotton bed, a dish of soup that hadn't been washed and pieces of white bread scattered around. It was incomparable to the living environment of Enlike's group; this was a human room.

"You really are eager to study. Do you look forward to the day you kill Hamyuts Meseta that much?"

While saying this, Boramot placed a small box on the table and took several Book fragments out of it.

Those were fragments of Books belonging to people who were killed by Hamyuts Meseta. Ganbanzel brought them for Enlike's group.

Enlike touched one of them.

It was a Book of an Armed Librarian named Haiza.

Haiza was running through a dense forest. He was fast, but not only that. While running, he also evaded attacks coming from all directions. Haiza's physical fitness was way above that of Enlike. He was frighteningly fast, accurate and had no wasted movements to boot. If Enlike as he was now would fight Haiza, his chances for victory were slim. He might be killed by gunfire before he would be able to shoot his lightning.

"Shit! Where are you, Hamyuts?!"

Armed Librarian Haiza was being chased. He sold confidential information that he obtained as an Armed Librarian to some country's intelligence agency. Due to their line of work, those who had this information equivalent to state secrets couldn't be allowed to convey it to any country or organization.

The one sent to assassinate him was Hamyuts Meseta.

While this still young – she was only 22 years old - woman was a newcomer amongst Armed Librarians, everyone already knew about her battle strength.

"Where are you? Where are you, Hamyuts?!"

The one being chased after was Haiza. However, he was the one physically chasing her around.

When the battle began Hamyuts suddenly turned her back and fled. She attacked him while escaping. This was Hamyuts's conventional tactic.

Haiza chased after her. She attacked while running away and he gave chase while protecting himself. While Haiza was fast, Hamyuts was overwhelmingly faster.

But he still had to chase her down. For him, who used a gun, the maximum range was about 150 meters. As long as he couldn't get into range, he wouldn't even be able to attack.

"Gwoh!"

Haiza tumbled. A large amount of blood poured from his calf. Hamyuts hit his artery. But she wouldn't stop. Another attack came without pause.

Just how many attacks had it been? Gravel was thrown with an intense rotation that made it curve like a snake. From the front, diagonally, and from directly above. The attacks also came flying at him from behind even though he was the one supposed to be chasing her.

If he was just shot at once or twice he would have been able to avoid it. But if ten shots were launched at him, one or two would graze him. If a hundred shots were launched at him and about ten or twenty of them would graze him, getting hit once or twice would inflict a fatal wound.

He'll have to finish her before getting finished. However, Hamyuts already was more than 500 meters away from him. He couldn't tell where she was. Haiza had completely lost any means of attack.

After that he was tortured to death.

His cheeks were cut, his shoulders were grazed, his flank was gouged into, and his legs were torn off.

Finally, when his head was crushed, the rain of stone bullets had stopped.

This was the pattern of Hamyuts's certain victories: a unilateral attack from outside the range and expectations of the enemy. Once inside that pattern, no matter what kind of powerful person would stand against her, they would be tortured to death in a way that couldn't be called a battle.

Both of his feet were torn to shreds and his gun was blown away.

Haiza, who stopped resisting, gazed up to the heavens.

"…How lacking."

At some point, Hamyuts came to his side. She looked down at him as if obstructing his view of the sky. The smile Haiza could see was a radiant smile such as one of a snake that caught its prey.

"You still aren't a match for Hamyuts with your current power."

Boramot said to Enlike who touched the Book.

"However, if you follow Ganbanzel-sama, there will definitely be a day when you can kill her. Never doubt this."

"…"

Enlike didn't say anything. His fingers touched the next Book.

The second Book fragment was that of a soldier. He was a low-grade soldier in the Imperial Army of Guinbex. After invading the neighboring Rona Kingdom, the Imperial Army of Guinbex received an order of ceasefire from the Present Management Agency. However, the higher-ups of the Army unilaterally broke it and resumed the attack. One of the Imperial Army's squads confronted Hamyuts, who was stationed there as an inspector of the ceasefire.

The soldiers already knew Hamyuts by name. However, a single woman wielding a sling couldn't possibly match things like fighter aircrafts and tanks as well as the

Magic users among the special troops. This was common knowledge amongst the higher-ups and simple soldiers alike.

Their strategy was the typical one of defending against Hamyuts with solid fortifications while bombarding her from the skies to immobilize her. They meant to completely burn out wherever she was.

When the battle started, all the airplanes, artillery deployed from within the fortification and tank guns bombarded her simultaneously. During this bombardment, Hamyuts hadn't resisted at all.

When it finally ceased, the tanks charged forward.

And just as those tank corps grew closer to Hamyuts…

Suddenly, the airplanes in the sky caught fire and crashed. They fell headlong on the tank corps on the surface.

Next, something huge had flown and hit the fort's wall. It was the gun barrel of a tank.

This gun barrel, meant to shoot bullets, became a bullet itself. It looked like a complete joke.

Next came the caterpillar tracks, engine, turret, and for the finishing blow, the corpses of the tank personnel that were twisted and smashed.

Those corpses were stuck to the fort's wall and turned into flimsy material that no longer had any human form.

The soldiers started panicking at this gruesome sight.

They understood that Hamyuts had dismantled the tank and threw its parts as if they were pebbles. The soldiers noticed their own earlier misunderstanding. The one with the overwhelming advantage in resources wasn't them. It was Hamyuts, since she could use everything around her as a weapon. Those cannonballs came flying one after another - tank parts, fighter aircraft parts, boulders, barbed wires that was torn into shreds, as well as the sandbags and lumber which have been used for the trenches.

These attacks, simply by virtue of their weight and speed, were stronger than any other attack exactly because they were so simple.

The last thing the soldier who was the owner of the Book saw was a human shape soaring above.

He tried escaping with his airplane, but suddenly lost control and entered a tailspin.

*Are you kidding me? That woman hit an airplane while it was flying?*

That was the last view he had seen.

Enlike read several Books of people who were killed by Hamyuts.

"I'll go back and sleep."

Enlike said as he closed the lid of the casket.

"Enlike, who would you like to fight next?"

Boramot asked.

"I don't really care."

"I see. Everyone on this island is your prey, huh? There's no need to rush."

Boramot went silent and smiled.

"Isn't it fun, Enlike? Enjoy yourself more and more. You're doing it for Ganbanzel-sama after all."

Without saying anything, Enlike opened the door and went out.

Enlike stopped after walking to the beach. It was near the part of the sea where Lonkenny disappeared. He recalled their fight there. Lonkenny's expression, the fireball that was almost shot and the lightning that struck him – Enlike recalled those one by one while staring into the dark sea.

"Try to smile."

Enlike muttered. Then, he began distorting his face. He raised the meat of his cheeks awkwardly. His eyebrows became deformed in a weird manner. His eyes narrowed unnaturally. It didn't look like a smile at all, but rather some odd expression.

"Smile, I want to smile."

Enlike muttered and tried twisting his face forcefully.

But it wasn't a smile. It was a fake smile, the same that he had inside the ship before meeting Ganbanzel.

"This is all wrong."

Muttering this, Enlike stopped trying to smile. His face returned to the previous gloomy expression.

"…Once again it's not enough."

He held his head.

Everyone on this island had misunderstood one thing about Enlike. Boramot, Kayas, Lonkenny and Sasari – they have all misunderstood. They were calling him a natural killer and one who loved to fight above all.

However, Enlike didn't find battle enjoyable even once.

When he succeeded in his Magic Deliberation and could shoot out lightning, when he first killed one of his comrades, and the one after him, and the one after, and even now – he didn't enjoy it at all.

If he were to tell this to anyone they would be shocked. It was already common knowledge on the island that he liked to battle.

Once, Ganbanzel had said that fighting and killing are the best of joys. And now, Boramot told him to enjoy killing.

Enlike wanted to do so from the bottom of his heart. Even he couldn't understand why he wasn't enjoying it.

Why couldn't he smile?

Enlike recalled the face of Hamyuts that he seen before. When she killed Haiza, Hamyuts was smiling. When she annihilated the Imperial Army of Guinbex, she probably smiled as well.

That nauseating, repulsive smile. Why couldn't he smile like Hamyuts?

He wanted to try and ask her. Why could she smile? What did she enjoy? How does it feel to enjoy something?

He wanted someone to tell him – what can he do to smile?

Enlike looked towards the sky. He saw that the full moon hanging in the heavens was sinking. He saw that stars were twinkling throughout the sky. However, Enlike couldn't think of them as beautiful.

During the next morning, there was obviously no sign of Lonkenny. However, no one talked about it. Talking about combat practice was taboo amongst the group. It was because just mentioning it would raise fear and collapse the equilibrium within their hearts. They only exchanged gazes filled with fear and despair from time to time.

"…Kayas-san. What will we do about the surplus?"

Qumola muttered while boiling water.

"…You eat it."

Kayas said.

"But it's bad."

"Then what will we do?"

"…Because it's Lonkenny-san's share, I'll give it to him."

After saying this, Qumola returned it to inside the paper package.

"Qumola, Lonkenny is already…"

Kayas tried to say something, but he held back. While looking at the bonfire, the two of them felt a silent sadness.

Enlike stared at them. Suddenly, Qumola raised her face. She then noticed Enlike was looking at her.

"Umm, is something the matter?"

Qumola spoke towards him in a frightened state. Enlike suddenly thought she resembled a mouse - her size, the atmosphere around her, and the way she ate food leftovers.

"I don't need anything from you."

Enlike said. While shrinking her body, Qumola got away from him. Speaking of which, it was the first time he had watched her in action. Until now, he acted indifferently towards her, as if she was a mere pebble on the roadside.

Why was it that he suddenly felt curious about her today? While pondering this, Enlike recalled what happened last night. Lonkenny talked about Qumola. For some reason, he mentioned her as he gave Enlike a seashell.

Enlike, who finished having his meal, went back to the cave. He left the seashell he received yesterday inside the suspended hammock.

He searched inside the hammock that he used.

Then, he heard a voice coming from behind.

"Enlike. What's that?"

When Enlike turned around he saw Kayas. He slept in the hammock next to him in the same cave.

"A seashell."

Enlike answered while showing it. Raising his eyebrow, Kayas asked again.

"That belongs to Lonkenny. Why do you have it?"

"He gave it to me last night."

Enlike answered honestly. He had no need to hide it.

"I see, so it was you who…"

For a split second, Kayas's eyes were filled with hatred. However, he soon averted his eyes as if he let it go. It was obvious. No matter how angry he was, he wouldn't be able to kill Enlike with his power.

"What is it?"

Enlike showed the seashell to Kayas.

"Isn't it obvious by looking at it? It's a seashell."

"What am I supposed to do with it?"

"What did he say?"

"He said to give it to Qumola."

"…So do that. Just give it to her."

Enlike still couldn't understand.

"What for?"

"Are you stupid? It'll make Qumola happy. Girls like pretty things."

Enlike didn't understand.

"We sometimes do that. Seashells, pretty stones, bird feathers… If we find unusual things, we give them to Qumola."

"I don't get it. Is there any meaning to doing this?"

Enlike shook his head.

"If you don't understand it doesn't matter. It doesn't have anything to do with you. Hand it over. You probably don't want to pass it anyway."

Enlike hesitated a little. He was somewhat interested, but neither Qumola nor the seashell had anything to do with him. He tossed the shell to Kayas.

Then, someone called to them from the cave's entrance.

"Kayas-san. Enlike-san. It's time for Magic Deliberation."

"Qumola, come here for a second."

Kayas beckoned.

"What is it?"

"Take this."

Kayas took Qumola's small hand and placed the seashell inside of it. She looked at it with a slightly surprised expression.

"So pretty."

Qumola mumbled and gently caressed the shell with her fingertips.

"That color's probably uncommon."

"Yes. Thank you so much, Kayas-san."

"…No, the one you need to thank is Lonkenny."

"Lonkenny-san?"

At that moment, Enlike saw – while Qumola caressed the seashell, she began to slightly smile. Even Kayas, who stood in front of him, started smiling so weakly that Qumola herself hadn't noticed.

Enlike became shocked, but not because her face seemed beautiful.

It was because her face overlapped with Relia's expression engraved inside his mind.

That smile held for a split second. Qumola's face then returned to its previous expression.

"What's wrong, Enlike?"

Kayas spoke to the engrossed Enlike.

"…You smiled."

Enlike muttered. He stared at Kayas with a puzzled look.

"What're you saying? Let's go. That bastard is waiting for us."

Enlike didn't think about that at all. She smiled. In front of him. Just like Relia during that day.

"Hey, come already. You idiot."

Kayas urged him. Enlike followed him despite the painful reluctance he felt.

From that day on, Enlike looked at Qumola in a different way than before.

# Chapter 6: The Self-Reproaching Soul, the Sacred Eyes

The next day, Noloty went to the warehouse Zatoh slept in.

There were still traces of destruction around it and people who looked like related officials talked among themselves. She peeked inside, but there was no sign of Zatoh. Noloty left the place.

He was at the next place she went to. Seeing his face, she felt some sense of relief.

However, Zatoh probably didn't share her feelings. He clearly looked annoyed when he saw her.

He was at the vacant lot in the back alleys, exactly where Noloty first met him. It was where he conducted his brawl business. When they first met, there was a crowd around, but now he sat all alone next to the signboard.

"…What do you want?"

Zatoh murmured.

"The same as yesterday. My mission is to save you. I came thinking that I can still do it somehow."

He sighed with a genuinely annoyed look on his face.

"Can I sit here?"

Noloty pointed next to Zatoh. He didn't answer, so she just sat down there.

"…"

He didn't say anything. Did he already give up telling her to kill him?

"You don't seem to have any customers."

"Because it's daytime."

Saying so, Zatoh looked around the barely crowded streets.

The two of them didn't speak with each other, and eventually the sun sank and it became night.

"You don't seem to have any customers."

The pedestrian traffic began to increase in the dark streets after the sun sank. When the people walking down the road saw Zatoh and Noloty, they talked silently among themselves and went past as if avoiding them. One of them whispered as he pointed at Noloty.

"Hey, that's an Armed Librarian…"

"Scary. She can probably kill 100 or 200 people like it's nothing."

"Don't make eye contact. We'll be killed."

"What kind of monster is she?"

Apparently, the fact that Zatoh endured Noloty's attack had become a rumor in the city. If he was able to endure that attack which was certainly unlike that of a trainee but of a full-fledged Armed Librarian, no one could dream of beating him.

"You don't seem to have any customers."

"Because of you."

"…I'm sorry."

"You're really annoying me."

Zatoh said, looking displeased.

"Thinking about it, why do you need money?"

Noloty asked. She thought about this for quite some time.

"…I planned on going to Bantorra Library. If I were to come to a mass of Armed Librarians, they would undoubtedly kill me. But since Bantorra is far, the travel expenses are nothing to sneeze at."

"Don't you already have enough?"

Noloty pointed at a bundle of money placed next to Zatoh. He pointed with his chin for her to check it. When she picked it up, it seemed strangely light. Only the top and bottom were real banknotes, and the rest was newspaper.

"…Horrible."

"I don't mind. They didn't beat me. Besides, if the person who can defeat me is in this city I don't need to go to Bantorra."

"…But it's still horrible. It's so hollow."

"I'm telling you that's what I want."

Noloty sighed. He was such a troubling person.

After a while, she rose on her feet.

"Well, it's time to go back."

"What did you come here for?"

Zatoh's question was natural. For the entire day, she did nothing but sit next to him.

"I'm going to save you, but you didn't do anything."

"Do you still want to save me?"

"Yes."

Noloty nodded.

"Honestly, after yesterday, I think it might be impossible to stop you."

"…"

"So, I tried thinking of another way of saving you besides killing."

Zatoh scratched his head with a truly perplexed expression.

"Does your idiocy have no bounds?"

"We are the same in this regard."

It seems that Zatoh didn't intend on staying there, as he prepared to go away.

"Zatoh-san. I'll see you tomorrow."

Zatoh turned around.

"Noloty, I have a question."

"What is it?"

"I once killed many people."

"…"

"…Saving me would mean desecrating those people's lives. Do you understand that?"

That question was a little different than his usual. For the first time, Zatoh didn't tell her to stop him, but instead asked if what she wanted to do was fine.

"Do you want to atone by dying?"

"There is no other way of atonement."

"Why do you have to atone by dying? Everyone can die.

It happens naturally to everyone, but it doesn't mean they atone for anything."

Zatoh seemed troubled for a while. Then, he spoke with a bitter voice.

"I see. Do as you want."

It was the first time Zatoh listened to her. Noloty felt a bit happy. She smiled broadly.

Seeing her face, he suddenly said,

"So you can smile as well."

"Huh?"

"No… never mind."

Zatoh, averting his gaze, ran away from Noloty's sight. He turned his back to her and quietly disappeared in the night-time city.

Noloty returned to her lodging in the sheriff's offices. There only seemed to be one person on night shift there. Noloty sat on the couch and sighed in relief.

*For now, it seems this day was a success.*

*But was doing this really fine? I need to recover Luimon-san's Book.*

However, right now it didn't seem like she could both save Zatoh and retrieve Luimon's Book. *I'll try the same thing tomorrow. I'll make Zatoh-san talk.*

Suddenly, the sheriff spoke to her.

"It seems you were together with a guy with strange hair today. What were you doing?"

*How should I explain this?*

"Let's call him something like a material witness."

"But I heard you were sitting there doing nothing."

The sheriff looked at Noloty with suspicious eyes.

"It can't be that he's paying you, right?"

"Hey, w-what are you even saying? Stop that."

Noloty denied while waving her hands.

"Well, I don't really think so, but what are you really doing?"

"Uuh, just trust me…"

She sighed. The sheriff then said with a serious face,

"It's just that I heard about something terrible that happened in Bantorra Library."

Noloty's face became rigid.

The information about the current incident was strictly controlled so it wouldn't reach the nations of the world or news agencies. However, it seemed like rumors couldn't be stopped.

"This doesn't have anything to do with Luimon-san. The Library is far away from here in the first place."

"But there was also that incident in Toatt Mining Town…"

"It's alright. There's no problem."

Noloty said forcefully. Since she denied it like that, it might have seemed more suspicious instead.

"…There's no way the Monster is in this city, right?"

The sheriff said anxiously. Noloty tried calming her heart.

"Don't say such an absurd thing."

"So everything's fine…"

The sheriff stopped the conversation short and went back to his desk. Noloty put a hand on her chest in relief.

Even so, she was still thinking. She didn't have any guarantee that guy wasn't the Monster. It's just that he vaguely didn't seem to be.

Noloty recalled the face of a certain Armed Librarian. *If only Minth-san was here, he could tell with one look.*

During the same time, Zatoh was inside the room of a small hotel. He thought about staying there for one more night and then search for a new lodging. Without paying any heed to the soft bed, he lay on the floor. He was unable to sleep well on a bed.

While lying on the floor, he recalled Noloty's face.

He felt as if he went along with her pace.

"Do you have any wish?"

Zatoh recalled her saying those words. At that time, he could barely stop his mouth from opening.

"I want to smile."

He almost said. It was truly good he didn’t, as he was already supposed to get rid of that wish.

Zatoh closed his eyes and tried sleeping. He then noticed that his hand started trembling.

"Again?"

While still lying down, Zatoh grabbed his finger and broke it. Clenching his teeth hard to stifle the pain, he bent the joints of his fingers to the opposite side. When he reached his ring finger after starting from his index finger, the tremors finally stopped. His fingers twitched and then regenerated to their previous shape.

The frequency of the tremors became slightly bigger than before. He had to die as soon as possible.

After his fingers finished regenerating, Zatoh closed his eyes and tried to sleep. However, after a short while, he once again jumped up.

His hand was trembling again. Zatoh tried grabbing his short sword. However, as his left hand was also trembling, he couldn't hold it well.

"Shit…"

He bit both of his hands. He sunk his teeth down to the bone and barely started chewing. His hands regenerated, he chewed them, and they regenerated again. However, the tremors didn't stop. The tremors that were supposed to stop if given enough pain didn't.

Zatoh's trembling hands started beating his own face. Both fists powerfully pounded him again and again. The tremors ceased just as he lost his consciousness.

"…Noloty-san! What're you doing!"

Noloty, who was sleeping on the sofa in the sheriff's offices, was woken up by this voice. Above her head she could see the sheriff's mustache.

"W-what's wrong?"

"This isn't a time to sleep! The Monster came to this city!"

He clenched a newspaper in his hands. Noloty couldn't read the contents, but she could see the words "Monster" and "Armed Librarian" on it.

"That rumor?"

"This isn't any rumor. We received a report from an eyewitness. There's a man with a golden helmet on the roofs of the northwest district!"

It was during the same day and same time inside an office in Bantorra Library. Ireia kept glaring at reports summarizing information from various places, while at her side Mirepoc kept her Thought Sharing with Armed Librarians from various places.

Ireia held her head. In addition to them not finding the Monster, there were now rumors that he appeared in various places. Even if they could make national governments and police officials stay silent about this, they couldn't suppress the news agencies and ordinary citizens who had a thirst for knowledge. At this rate, if they keep concealing information, fear around the world will grow and Armed Librarians will lose the citizens' trust. In the worst-case scenario, the greatest taboo of Bantorra Library – the existence of the Indulging God Cult – will come to light.

"At this kind of time Hamyuts-san is…"

Ireia mumbled. As heard from the tone of her voice, she was losing her usual calm. At that moment, Mirepoc who was busy with her Thought Sharing had opened her eyes.

"A top priority message from Minth-san."

"What is it?"

Ireia bent forward.

"He found a person who's seemingly the Monster in Ismo Republic's Bujui."

"Seemingly?"

Ireia knit her brows.

"Yes. This is what he said."

"That's strange. With Minth-san's ability, there shouldn't be a 'seemingly'."

"However, that is what he said. I'll attempt another Thought Sharing."

Mirepoc closed her eyes and sent her thoughts.

"My thoughts have reached him, but there is no answer. He is apparently in combat."

Noloty ran out of the sheriff's offices. The sheriff and the rest didn't follow her. Even if they were to use their guns, that wouldn't change anything against people like Noloty and the Monster.

Noloty was thinking while she ran. *It can't be. But there's no other conclusion. Is the Monster really Zatoh-san?*

Before reaching the place the eyewitness mentioned, as Noloty ran through the road, a brilliant golden object entered her line of sight. A person wearing a golden helmet and a black cloak leapt from roof to roof like a leopard. Noloty saw him crossing from right to left.

She ran up to the roof and began jumping up and down while aiming for his back. He was faster than her. At this rate, she won't catch up to him. Noloty hesitated whether to call "Zatoh-san".

Then, she noticed someone running on the rooftops behind her.

Noloty turned around and looked at their figure.

"Zatoh-san!"

Noloty called in relief. So Zatoh wasn't the Monster after all.

With his transparent hair fluttering behind him, Zatoh made a huge leap and overtook Noloty.

When he moved ahead from her, he shot her a fleeting glance. Both the Monster and Zatoh quickly grew far from Noloty. Sighing, she kept running ahead.

Noloty was lagging behind, but Zatoh had no intention of stopping. Could she even catch up at this rate? Rather than that, it was more important chasing after the Monster ahead.

That Monster was seen during the morning. After Zatoh had beaten his face and lost his consciousness inside the hotel room, he regained consciousness with the morning's light. He didn't notice his blunder until then.

A person with a golden helmet was standing still on the roof. Those carved eyes, looking like in the midst of laughter, stared at Zatoh. People had already started gathering around the area and became noisy.

Zatoh immediately kicked the window open. The Monster promptly ran away, not showing any intention of fighting.

Zatoh ran along the port. He already noticed he was being lured.

He ran across the port and into the harbor to the outside of the city.

Upon exiting the city, the shoreline extended endlessly northward.

The Monster stopped there. There were no people around. It seemed like his goal was moving the fight to a deserted place.

Zatoh thought to himself that moving to a deserted place intentionally was unlike the Monster.

He started talking to the Monster as he turned around. His hands were emitting sparks of lightning.

"First, let me ask you – who are you?"

The monster didn't say anything. He just breathed heavily.

"…What's Ganbanzel doing?"

Once again, silence. He didn't show any intention of attacking or running away; his cloak merely swayed.

Zatoh stopped trying to talk to him. He started running and clenched his fist to attack the Monster.

From within the cloak, a swarthy hand stretched forward and blocked that fist. Zatoh repelled the oncoming counterattack kick with his elbow.

Neither of them used any ability. As if telling each other to wait-and-see, they exchanged blows.

Using the recoil from blocking a front kick with his two hands, Zatoh drew back. His hand emitted a pale blue light as if signaling the end of the preliminary test.

"Come, impostor."

Zatoh spoke. At the same time, the Monster drew a sword from inside his cloak. It was a wide and bulky sword, similar to a hatchet. The Monster lightly flung it in front of him. Lightning fell on that sword. Creating this opening by defending against the lightning, the Monster leapt ahead.

*How naïve*. Zatoh read his movements.

He jumped forward before the Monster and trampled on the sword. The Monster stopped just before reaching him and retreated, heaving up sand.

"…What's that? You're weak."

Zatoh said with a disappointed expression.

"It's time for you to reveal your true identity."

Then, the Monster talked for the first time.

"Right, I'm no match for the real deal."

Zatoh noticed that voice sounded familiar to him. Thinking about it, so was that sword he stepped on.

"But did you really fall for this?"

While saying this, the Monster put a hand to his mask. It was then that Noloty came running with heavy breaths.

"Aah, s-so it started… Zatoh-san, are you okay?!"

Rushing to Zatoh, she pointed her fist at the Monster.

"What are you doing Noloty, aren't you pointing that fist at the wrong guy?"

The Monster removed his mask.

"…It's you."

"Minth-san…"

Zatoh and Noloty spoke simultaneously. Under the mask was the face of the Armed Librarian Minth Chezine. He was one of the three people who fought the Monster before.

"Long time no see, Monster-kun."

Minth grinned while saying this.

He threw the mask and cloak into the sea. Underneath he wore his usual gaudy jacket.

"What are you doing, Minth-san?"

"Isn't that what I should be asking you?"

Minth briskly stepped towards Noloty. Then he suddenly slammed his head onto her forehead.

"O-ouch!"

Noloty cowered while holding her forehead. Zatoh watched her in amazement.

"Weren't you supposed to be looking for Luimon's Book?"

"Huh?"

"Why were you chasing me around with that guy?"

"Because you were the Monster- gyaah!"

Minth landed another head-butt. Because it was enough to make her jump a bit, it made even Zatoh grimace despite only watching from the side.

"Did you get yourself a nice man after thinking that you can't retrieve the Book? Not bad pretending to be cute like that."

Saying this, Minth dragged up Noloty who fell on the sand.

"Monster-kun. I need to go give this girl a thorough lecture, so please wait here for a while."

Minth grasped Noloty's scruff and started dragging her.

"…Minth Chezine, what are you doing?"

"Isn't it obvious? I impersonated the Monster hoping to lure you and caught even her."

At that point, Noloty slipped a word in.

"…Wait a second. That person isn't the Monster."

"Hmph. Is that what you think?"

Minth closely looked at her face. He then inquired Zatoh.

"Is that so, Zatoh-san? Aren't you the Monster?"

"No, I *am* the Monster."

"Here you go, Noloty. So, you were the one we fought in Bantorra Library?"

"Yes. You, the guy with two pistols, and the girl with a rapier. I fought all three of you."

"Right."

Minth grinned.

"Well, I'll take care of you afterwards. Wait right here. Because when I'm done with my business, I'm coming to kill you."

"Good, I'll wait."

Minth took Noloty towards the city. Zatoh was silent and watched them from behind.

"…Did he escape?"

Zatoh murmured. It was possible he avoided battle entirely by diminishing the enemy's fighting spirit with his loose tongue. Even when he head-butted Noloty it was probably meant to dampen Zatoh's spirit. He didn't know what his ability was, but that twin-pistol guy said he wasn't combat oriented. Was it a technique related to surviving like this?

In any case, Zatoh thought that this was the end. Since a real Armed Librarian came from Bantorra Library, he was undoubtedly going to get killed. If he will wait there, Minth will come with reinforcements and kill him.

It took a while, but he was finally going to die. Noloty's farce will also end.

Suddenly, his head began hurting.

"…What?"

Zatoh scowled. He felt as if his head was expanding and about to explode.

Noloty was dragged by Minth back to the city. When they came near the sheriff's offices, he finally released her. After removing his hand from her scruff, Minth looked around them. Then, he drew a small bottle from his chest pocket and looked at its contents.

"Did he really not follow us?"

"Is that one of Mokkania-san's winged ants?"

Noloty asked Minth as he peered inside the bottle.

"Yeah. I borrowed it from him. It's for monitoring Zatoh."

There was a single ant inside the bottle - a queen ant remodeled by the Magic of the Armed Librarian called Mokkania. It was slightly larger than normal. Currently, several flying ants circled Zatoh's surroundings. If something abnormal were to happen to him, it would get transmitted to the queen ant inside the bottle.

"What's Zatoh-san doing?"

After peeping at the queen ant, Minth answered,

"Seems like he's waiting quietly. What's his deal?"

Saying this, he faced Noloty.

"C'mon, Noloty, I'll have you talk to me about him."

Noloty hesitated. Hamyuts's orders were to not let any other Armed Librarian know about her top-secret mission. She couldn't talk about it.

"I don't understand as well. He might be the Monster, but I'm not so sure about…"

"What've you been doing till now? Wasn't your mission retrieving Luimon's Book?"

"Actually, I have this plus another mission. I can't speak about it in detail."

"…I haven't heard about this."

Minth put a hand to his chin.

"I also have some questions. Is that person truly the Monster as you've said? With your ability you should know, right Minth-san?"

"I'm asking because I don't know. Who is this Zatoh guy?"

"…Huh?"

"I don't understand as well. He's not the Monster."

Minth Chezine. He was not an Armed Librarian who specialized in combat. His true value lay in investigation of crimes. In particular, he specialized in looking for people.

His ability was named Sacred Eyes. This ability allowed him to see the very soul of a person.

Once activated, he could see through things like the state of mind, nature, and preferences of a person; basically, the shape of their soul. It might have seemed simple, but it could aid things like interrogation of criminals or suspects, finding traitors among allies, judging the aptitude of subordinates and more; an ability useful in many different ways.

"I've seen the soul of the Monster– his nature was evil, his thoughts were of self-interest, and his wish was chaos. But for this Zatoh guy – his nature is foolishness, his thoughts are of nihility, and his wish is atonement. No matter how many times I look at him, he doesn't look like the Monster at all.

It's unthinkable for him to have had a change of heart or a split personality. No matter how I look at it, he seems to be a different person."

"So it's not him, just as I thought."

"However, there's no reason to think he's not the Monster. With his lightning and super regeneration, or more importantly how it felt fighting with him, they are all similar to the Monster.

Above all else, he told us himself that he was the Monster.

He's of the same size, knows things only the Monster would know, uses the same abilities, and speaks of himself as the Monster. If he's not the Monster despite all of that, what does it mean?"

Minth stared at Noloty.

"Now then, start talking. What were you doing until now? I haven't heard anything about a top-secret mission. And if you'll try lying I'll find out immediately."

"Uh…"

Noloty resigned. She started telling him everything starting from when Hamyuts brought her to meet Zatoh.

When she finished, Minth looked at her with a surprised expression.

"Did you really meet the Director?"

"…Yes."

"Didn't you receive the notification from the old lady?"

"W-what? I haven't heard anything…"

"Right now, the Director is missing."

"W-what's that supposed to mean?! The Director?!"

"That woman did something unthinkable."

It was about ten days prior. A month had passed since the Monster's assault on the Library. Hamyuts Meseta sat in the Director's office. Through Mirepoc she received reports from various places, gathered all the information and sent orders. In addition, she stretched her Sensory Threads around, vigilant against any attack.

Hamyuts, who was working silently until then, suddenly stood up.

"I'm dooone. Mirepo, can I quit?"

Saying this, Hamyuts tossed the pen behind her. Mirepoc, who was at her side, suspended her Thought Sharing.

"What do you mean by quitting, Director?"

Hamyuts stood while scratching her head.

"Hey, Mirepo. Can you recall the old lady from Ismo? I'm leaving this to you two."

Mirepoc, while confused by the sudden order, asked,

"Will you join the search party as well, Director?"

"No, I won't search for him. I'll just go and fight him."

"…Huh?"

Mirepoc was completely dumbfounded.

"Currently we're just sending everyone to look around for him. Wouldn't it be better if I were to fight him and reach a conclusion?"

"With all due respect, I cannot understand what you mean by this."

"Didn't he say he came here to fight me? So I'm saying that I can just go and fight him."

"Pardon me, Director. But wasn't your plan to discover the Monster and then send more than four powerful Armed Librarians to fight him?"

"I don't care about that. I want to fight with that guy. That's all."

Hamyuts smiled while saying this. Mirepoc questioned her with anger.

"…Director, have you forgotten that when you have fought alone in Toatt Mining Town you nearly died?"

"Oh, you mean with that Cigal guy."

Mirepoc's words, that tried discouraging her, had the opposite effect.

"Those are some good memories… that time when I was earnestly losing."

Hamyuts stood up.

"I'll have to use every possible move in my disposal against that kind of opponent."

"…If you are being truthful, I can't help but doubt your mental stability."

"Oh, Mirepoc. I'll have to deduct points from you."

She pointed at Mirepoc with one finger.

"Do you still think I'm sane?"

"From then on, the Director hid her whereabouts and chased after the Monster. Old Ireia was furious. 'How can the God's Representative say she wants to fight and act independently like this?!' and such.

Just what has she been doing? I can't understand why the Director gave you that order."

Minth finished talking. Noloty listened to him while dumbfounded.

"What's the Director thinking?"

"I don't know. That's my question to you."

Minth said in disappointment.

"I wonder why she gave me that order…"

"I don't know about that either. However, she only has one goal."

"Fighting the Monster, you mean?"

She didn't know Hamyuts's aim. Until now, she acted according to her orders. But why did she issue those orders to her?

A person who wasn't the Monster while similar to the Monster, and Hamyuts Meseta, who wanted to fight that Monster.

She had a bad feeling about something. Didn't Hamyuts just take advantage of her? Wasn't she just used as a pawn to grant Hamyuts's wish of fighting the Monster?

The two faced each other and kept thinking. Zatoh's true identity, Hamyuts's goals… there were only things they couldn't understand.

After a while, Minth opened his mouth.

"This is only hypothetical, but I might know something about his identity."

"Huh?"

"That transparent hair… people with the same kind of hair were recorded in history. Hair color and a person's ability are often tied together."

"What kind of ability is it?"

"…The ability known as Book-Eating."

One hundred years ago, there was a boy. He was the owner of beautiful transparent hair as well as the ability called Book-Eating. Neither his achievements nor misdeeds were left for the future. Only little bits of that name have been recorded in the history of Magical research.

In front of some Magic researchers, he brought a single Book to his mouth. It was the Book of a Magician. The Book became sand and started flowing into his mouth.

Immediately after, despite him being ten years old, he became able to use Magic without acquiring any training as a Magician.

Furthermore, he kept eating more Books one after another. When he ate the Book of a lawyer he became able to recite the law from memory, when he ate the Book of a swordsman he became able to wield a sword, and when he ate the Book of a politician he became able to give a splendid speech about common political ideas.

However, after a while his body's condition became bad – there were frequent tremors in his hands; uneasiness in his mind; he developed split personalities; and finally, he injured himself.

The boy said,

"Help me! They're coming out of the swamp… they're going to eat me!"

The researchers determined that the eaten Books rebelled inside the boy. However, they had no idea how to help him. A year after having first complained about his condition, the boy died.

When his Book was found, it was several times larger than a normal one. It was said that touching his Book led to several people's worth of memories to flow inside, breaking the spirit of the reader. That Book was housed in the Fifth Sealed Archive of Bantorra Library.

"That sort of power…"

Noloty mumbled.

"There isn't any evidence, but I think it fits.

He ate the Monster's Book, and his mind was hijacked by him. Then, in order to suppress the Monster, he wanted to die. The Director told you to not let him die so she could fight the Monster."

"…Then, Zatoh-san…"

"Might become possessed by the Monster."

At the same time when Minth and Noloty faced each other…

There were two people inside the room of a hotel located in central Bujui. They occupied the highest floor of the highest grade hotel, and enjoyed the fragrance of tea mixed with brandy.

"…Eh, Minth is quite something. So he realized the Book-Eating deal."

One of the two people opened her mouth. She was Hamyuts Meseta.

After closing her eyes and releasing Sensory Threads from her body, she surveyed the movements of Minth and Noloty.

"It's going faster than I imagined. I thought it's about time I lend a hand, but it seems it's no longer necessary."

"Hmm… does that mean it was within your expectations?"

The one talking to Hamyuts was an old man. He was a True Man of the Indulging God Cult as well as the ringleader behind the creation of the Monster – Ganbanzel

Grof. Those two, who used to be bitter enemies, were now sitting together inside the hotel room without trying to kill each other.

"But, Hamyuts… Just what is going to happen now? At this rate, won't Armed Librarians come from Bantorra and kill Zatoh?"

"Yeah, it is so."

"Why did you send that lass? She was utterly useless!"

Ganbanzel said in rage. With her eyes still closed, Hamyuts answered calmly.

"It's Noloty's turn now. Please watch quietly."

"But, Hamyuts…"

"Shut up."

Hamyuts slightly opened her eyes and stared at Ganbanzel. He leaked a small cry and went silent, getting overpowered.

"Wait for a little more. It's going to get interesting now."

Saying this, Hamyuts smiled.

"Soon, it will be time for Zatoh-kun to get excited as well."

Hamyuts sent her Sensory Threads to Zatoh who was waiting on the beach. Her face had a terrible smile. Her whole body was itching for the imminent battle.

"Quickly, quickly resurrect, Monster-kun. Quickly come to entertain me."

At the same time, Zatoh was struggling against the tremor in his hands.

He scratched at his skin and tore his flesh. Despite his bones already being exposed, the tremor wouldn't stop. The oozing of greasy sweat wasn't the only painful thing.

"…This, this is…"

Zatoh desperately tore off his body. Nothing like this ever happened before. When he received pain by scraping his meat, it would sink inside that guy's body. However, it didn't happen like that now.

Suddenly, his eyes went dark. Zatoh felt his consciousness being dragged inside his body.

Minth and Noloty faced each other and worried together. An abnormal sound broke their silence. The queen ant inside the bottle flapped her wings. That informed of an abnormal event that happened to Zatoh.

Minth peeked at the queen ant and spoke in a tense voice.

"…Noloty, I'm disappointed."

"What's wrong?"

"That bastard ran away."

Noloty instinctively raised her voice.

"This can't be! He's not the kind of person to run away like that!"

Without listening to her, Minth started running.

"…We don't have time for this. Let's go after him!"

He shouted while running.

"Noloty, maybe he's not the kind of person to run away. But it doesn't mean that the guy inside him is like that too!"

# Chapter 6: Final Past – Slaughter

One time Zatoh got out of the Book in the middle. He was a little tired. Only a small time had passed, but reading the Book exhausted his mind. He turned his head around and lightly pressed on his eyes.

"How do you find it?"

"Interesting. This boy who wants to become a monster… yeah, he's interesting."

Lascall, who stood by Zatoh's side, sent him a curious look.

"However, wouldn't you rather directly eat rather than read it? Isn't that your ability?"

Zatoh answered while stretching his fingers again.

"Reading it is also interesting. I'm quite frankly tired of just eating."

At that time, a huge wave suddenly appeared in the calm sea. It wet the corpse of the boy lying next to Zatoh and Lascall and receded.

Zatoh's fingers once again touched Enlike's Book.

Even after Enlike saw Qumola's smile, the following days passed as usual without any change. Every day he simply sat on the beach to conduct his Magic Deliberation and improve the power and accuracy of his lightning. For a while, there was no night-time combat training. These days could have been called peaceful in a twisted way.

"That's enough for today."

Boramot announced. Enlike and the rest opened their eyes and stood up. Boramot started preaching like usual in front of them.

"Not even one of you had succeeded in your Deliberation today. I'm at the limits of my patience seeing your unsightly performance. If you don't want to be killed, get stronger. Those who will not be able to will die. Don't forget this. That's it."

Boramot's sermon ended and the group dispersed. Enlike and the rest started returning to their caves like usual.

"Hey, Enlike."

When Enlike was about to go back, Boramot called out to him.

"What's wrong with you lately?"

"What?"

Enlike returned a question because he couldn't understand. Although the speed of his growth had slightly diminished, he still kept growing stronger.

"Lately, you haven't been reading the Books about Hamyuts."

"Yeah."

Thinking about it, rather than him not reading them lately, it's more like he forgot they existed.

"Did you already memorize Hamyuts's capabilities? You don't need to see them anymore?"

Boramot was wrong. Enlike's purpose in reading the Books about Hamyuts wasn't to check her capabilities in the first place. What he wanted to see was her smile.

Since denying it would be bothersome, he decided to leave it at that.

"Yes, that's it."

"Hmm… oh well. Keep making an effort so you can become a real monster."

The two separated and each went back to their residence.

When Enlike came back, Qumola was wielding a hammer next to the bonfire for some reason.

"I'm sorry for breaking your cup, Kayas-san. I'll try to fix it."

"Oh man, that sucks."

Kayas scratched his head.

"What am I going to do now?"

"Please use this one instead."

"Is this a medicine bottle? It smells weird…"

"I'm sorry!"

"Ah, it's fine."

Kayas and Qumola talked in a friendly manner. Enlike carefully watched them doing so.

Ever since the day he saw Qumola's smile, only one thing had changed - he began following her with his eyes. Whenever they were together, he would look at her face and movements.

Suddenly, Qumola noticed she was being watched. Their gazes met and it caused her body to shiver. The frightened Qumola went to hide behind Kayas.

"…"

Enlike averted his gaze.

"Anyways, it's time to eat. Let's all eat to our heart's content and choke on it!"

After Kayas's greetings, the usual meal time started. They also put the leftovers of the military rations inside the cloth in the middle like usual.

Then, something unusual happened.

Just before finishing his meal, Enlike still had a mouthful left. He decided putting it on the cloth for Qumola. Everyone there was staring at his face.

"What's wrong, Enlike?"

Kayas asked without thinking.

"Nothing."

Enlike answered bluntly.

"Umm, Enlike-san, you don't need to worry for me…"

Qumola said with a small voice.

"…I see."

Feeling a bit lonely, Enlike picked up what he put on the cloth and tossed it inside his mouth. It was disgusting as usual.

He considered trying to talk to Qumola. He didn't know anything about her. He only knew about her smile that he had seen only once and her timid appearance that was like a mouse.

Enlike wanted to know more about Qumola. However, she was terribly afraid of him. Whenever he would raise his voice towards her, her legs would shake. Whenever he looked at her, Enlike hesitated if he should try talking to her.

As meal time was over, the group began chatting. During this, Kayas was exchanging words with the others. Qumola was sitting all by herself besides him.

"Now that I think about it, Qumola."

Kayas opened his mouth.

"I want to see your treasures."

"Huh?"

"Everyone gave them to you, right? Show us."

Qumola made a small nod and ran to her cave.

"Here they are."

She brought a small bag from the cave. She laid it in the center of the circle and sat there as well. Her position was such that her back was turned towards Enlike who sat a little farther.

"Not bad at all."

"Oh, this is the one I gave you."

"Who gave you that?"

The group was talking happily. Qumola who was at the center of attention also seemed to have fun. However, Enlike couldn't take part in the conversation. Without saying anything, he simply stared at Qumola's small back.

Feeling lonely, he finally left his spot. As Qumola and the rest were happily chatting amongst themselves, no one had noticed him.

"What is it, Enlike?"

Boramot poked out his face from inside the log cabin. Enlike had decided to come there.

"Do you want the read the Books about Hamyuts?"

Enlike shook his head to the side.

"Hmm, oh well. Come in."

Enlike was invited inside. Boramot's cabin was warm. On top of his table was a half-eaten canned meat, corn soup and a liquor bottle.

"What is it? Do you want to kill someone?"

Enlike shook his head.

"What's wrong, Enlike? You're acting strange lately."

"I have a question. Why is Qumola here?"

"What?"

Boramot frowned.

"What's wrong with Qumola? What will you do with that information?"

"Nothing."

"…Oh well."

Boramot took a sip from his bottle and started talking.

"She's a Meat like you brats. Since her mind is still close to a human being, I brought her thinking that she might be of use."

"And?"

"That's it. Why are you asking?"

Boramot said in a bored tone. Enlike began thinking.

"Everyone seems to care about her. Why is that?"

As Enlike said this, Boramot looked even more bored.

"What, did you also start taking interest in the opposite sex?"

That way of speaking was more unpleasant than ever.

"That's not what I mean. I'm just asking why everyone seems to care about her."

After pouring more alcohol down his throat, Boramot answered.

"They're a bunch of guys stuck on an island without knowing of the outside world. Even that sort of mouse will catch their interest."

Enlike took offense in him calling her a mouse. He also thought that way of her, but Boramot saying it felt unpleasant to him.

"I have once seen her smile."

"And what of it?"

"Why did she smile?"

Boramot snorted after hearing Enlike's question.

"Because she's a mouse. Give her some food and she will obviously smile. That's all."

Boramot gulped down the remaining liquor as if saying the conversation was over. Enlike felt that his eyes were telling him to go away if he didn't have any further business.

However, that's not what he wanted to hear. Enlike stood up while thinking about Boramot's disappointment.

He returned in front of the bonfire. The fire was already gone and Qumola and the rest were nowhere to be seen. While staring at the bonfire's traces, Enlike recalled Qumola's small back and the faint smile he had seen her wear that day.

"…Qumola."

He let out that name with a small voice. There was no reply.

Enlike suddenly looked up to the sky. He could see a lone bird flying.

He shot out lightning. It shined in the night-time sky for an instant, and the bird fell down with a tailspin.

Enlike looked at the feathers of the bird that fell to his feet. Those bluish feathers looked pretty. He grabbed the bird's neck and pluck out a slightly singed feather.

Days kept passing without any change.

Enlike's abilities have visibly deteriorated. He failed at strengthening his Magic with the Deliberation and even in using lightning strikes which he worked so hard on perfecting until now. Also during that day, his lightning that was supposed to be able to travel about five meters struck instead in his immediate vicinity.

Enlike's body bounced and fell on top of the sand. Boramot came up running in a hurry.

"What's wrong, Enlike?"

Boramot's tone was severe. As Enlike's abilities deteriorated, Boramot also stopped giving him special treatment. His voice was the same as when he talked to the other guys, a mixed tone of scorn and anger.

Fortunately, he avoided a direct hit. Enlike rose while staggering.

"…That's enough for you. Go back and let Qumola take care of you."

"…Hey, Enlike. Get a hold of yourself."

After saying this, Kayas tried lending a hand to him.

"He can go by himself. Continue your Deliberation!"

Boramot's angry voice echoed. Enlike got up and dragged his aching body back to the cave where Qumola was.

"Enlike-san…"

Qumola stepped up towards the wounded Enlike who was returning to the cave. He then calmly gave her instructions.

"First, bring water. We need to cool the wound and then also let me drink a bit. Use the medicine afterwards."

Just as she was told to, Qumola cooled off his wound and applied medicine. Both her hand movements and expression were clumsy. Seeing her fearfully touch him like that was somewhat sad.

There was no one around. Enlike thought - *Maybe now I can talk to her*.

Timidly, so as to not scare Qumola, Enlike raised a small voice.

"…Qumola."

Qumola started pitifully shaking even more.

"…What is it?"

She asked back in a fragile voice.

"Am I scary?"

After looking troubled for a while, she answered.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Everyone says you're scary."

"What are they saying?"

"They say that you love killing and that you only think about which one of them you want to kill."

It was not true. Enlike thought about telling her, but didn't. If he were to say such thing, it would be like him declaring he is not a monster.

If he were to become a monster, he would be able to smile. Enlike still had this lingering regret.

"…Marlin-san, Veyzach-san and Lonkenny-san were all killed by you…"

"I had no choice."

Enlike replied.

"We're all here so we become monsters. If we can't become monsters we will simply die."

"…"

Qumola didn't answer, and Enlike became sad again. He wanted to hear some affirmation or even a denial. The silence rejected him far more harshly than anything.

Even he didn't know what to say. She applied his medicine using cotton.

"I have a question."

"What is it?"

"Some time before I've seen you smile. I want to know why you were smiling."

Qumola's hands froze.

"That didn't happen. I haven't smiled in a long time."

"Do you remember Lonkenny's seashell?"

"…Yes."

"I've seen you smile when Kayas gave it to you."

"Did that really happen?"

Qumola answered, confused.

"Did I smile?"

"Do you remember now? Why did you smile then?"

"When I received the shell, I thought that perhaps Lonkenny-san was still alive."

"That's it?"

"…That's it."

Enlike was a bit disappointed. *Is that all?* He thought to himself.

"What will make you smile?"

"If everyone will stay alive, that will make me happy."

"I see."

The treatment was already over. Enlike stood up and turned his back to Qumola.

*I feel like I've understood something.*

Qumola could smile because there were people who cared for her.

That didn't hold for Enlike. No-one cared about him, so he couldn't smile.

For Enlike, who was all alone, the only way to smile was by fighting. Just like Ganbanzel said, just like Boramot said, he could only smile by fighting and killing.

However, he also felt that something was wrong.

Was this really his goal?

He shook off that question from his head. It was the only thing he could do.

From that day on, Qumola avoided Enlike even more than usual. Enlike was sad, but he didn't try talking to her again.

More time had passed.

Enlike's growth was still slow. There were those who began closing the gap among the group.

For example, Sasari. His ability allowed him to control water. The power of the high-speed water bullets he could shoot exceeded that of a normal handgun.

Although he was inferior to Enlike in his power to deal killing blows, the range and scope of his attacks were better than lightning.

One day, Sasari suddenly talked to him.

"Tonight. You and me."

There was no combat practice in a long time. It was no longer conducted for Enlike's sake. It would become a struggle to see who will survive and become a monster, Sasari or Enlike.

Sasari couldn't hide the excitement on his face. He was trembling, probably due to that as well.

"I looked forward to this day."

Sasari said.

"Why?"

"Qumola will be happy if you die."

Sasari said while smiling. The mention of Qumola's name greatly upset Enlike.

"Why?"

"You know. Qumola hates you."

*That's not true* – he wanted to say, but didn't. Qumola had a reason for hating him after all – it was because he kept killing her friends.

The battle between the two began as the moon ascended.

"Begin!"

After Boramot shouted, the two began activating their abilities at the same time.

Both of them had offensive abilities that were far above their defenses. Enlike's expectations that the match would be over immediately were betrayed right at the very beginning.

Just as the lightning hit, Sasari moved back. After it struck the sand in vain, Enlike's entire body was bombarded by water bullets. He was blown away and rolled on the sand.

"…Aah!"

He groaned. Sasari then pursued him again.

If he were to concentrate his attacks on one spot, Sasari could penetrate Enlike's body. But he didn't choose to do so. Rather than creating an opening by using a single blow, he instead opted for the more reliable consecutive hits. He shot the small water bullets in an extensive perimeter. It was like an absurdly powerful spray. Enlike couldn't evade it. He could only cower on the ground while enduring those attacks down to his bones.

At the instant he would try standing up all of his bones would break and it would be his end. While keeping himself in the minimal space of bombardment, Enlike kept looking for a chance to counterattack.

When the bullets grazed him they tore his skin, and when they hit they cracked his bones. Enlike tried retreating while crawling on the sand.

"Oho!"

Boramot's cry reached Enlike's ears. Was he surprised or was he pleased?

"Why, are you, so quiet, Enlike!"

Sasari shouted and kept attacking. While calmly keeping a steady distance from Enlike, he slowly started to corner him. He always stayed out of reach for Enlike's lightning attack.

Enlike kept looking for some breakthrough. But there was nothing he could do right now. He could hear his bones cracking. Even from afar it was obvious that they were breaking. Clenching his teeth, Enlike waited for some chance to counterattack.

"Sasari! That's enough. Finish him off!"

Boramot could be heard shouting this. *I got it*, thought Enlike. When Sasari will make a bold move to settle the match, if Enlike could avoid that, a chance will come.

"Shut up!"

However, Sasari roared in anger as a response.

"…What?"

"This is my fight, don't open your mouth!"

Enlike mentally clicked his tongue. Sasari was alert. There was no gap for a counterattack.

This one-sided battle lasted for about a minute. For Enlike, who could only receive the attacks without doing anything, it was an endlessly long minute.

And just as he was about to lose all of his fighting spirit…

The turning point had arrived.

The moon became hidden by the clouds, and the surroundings were wrapped in darkness.

Among the people around, only Enlike noticed that this was the turning point.

He moved.

Enlike shot out a lightning strike, tearing through the darkness. It wasn't aimed for Sasari who was standing farther back. It was aimed to his right where there was nothing.

Five meters ahead to Enlike's right, light and dust rose up.

"…!"

Sasari lost sight of Enlike in the sudden darkness for just an instant.

And then there was sudden lightning. Reflexively, Sasari aimed his attack there. The water bullets penetrated the dust and flew into the darkness in vain.

With that opening, the outcome was decided. Enlike ran atop the sand to the left as if drawing a semicircle. Noticing his error, Sasari corrected the path of his attack. However, to aim for Enlike, who was running in an arc, a bit of time was required.

"Oh s-"

Sasari retreated. However, he was too slow. Enlike slightly closed the gap.

Lightning shot with his entire body's strength blended with the water bullets.

Inside the roar resounding on the beach,

"…Qumola."

Did he mishear such a murmur?

The two were hit by the interlaced attacks. They both fell atop the sand at the same time.

The water bullets blew Enlike away, and the lightning annihilated Sasari.

"I won…?"

Enlike muttered.

Their strength was even. If this was during the day, or on a cloudless moonlit night, Enlike would have lost.

"…So you survived, Enlike."

Boramot, looking at him from the side, said so while approaching.

"This should be a good cure for your slacking lately. Regret this and keep doing your best for Ganbanzel-sama like before."

Enlike tried raising his wounded body. His feet wouldn't listen to him. Boramot said something, but he couldn't hear it well.

"But you having trouble with that level of opponent… Enlike?"

His feet couldn't move. He fell forward.

"Enlike!"

Enlike lost his consciousness after hearing Boramot's voice from afar.

When he opened his eyes, he saw he was inside Boramot's cabin. He had been laid on a blanket spread on the floor. His body was wrapped by bandages all around.

Boramot couldn't be seen anywhere, but instead Qumola was there.

"Why are you here?"

"Boramot-san brought me here."

He looked outside the window. It was already evening. Enlike was surprised to think he had been sleeping for more than half a day.

"Where's Boramot?"

"He was here just now, but went out to supervise everyone's Magic Deliberation."

Qumola explained indifferently. Enlike felt something unnatural in her tone of voice. He recalled that Sasari said Qumola hates him.

"Enlike-san, I need to apply your medicine, so show me your back."

Qumola said and closed on Enlike.

"I don't think I really hurt my back."

"You simply haven't noticed it. Come on."

Enlike turned around his back to her. Qumola put her hand on it.

"Qumola."

Enlike softly said then.

"What are you going to do with that knife?"

He could feel that Qumola's body had stopped with a start. He turned around again and looked up at her.

She held a small knife in her hand and looked down at Enlike.

"…"

The two of them were completely frozen for a while. Enlike barely managed to say a word.

"Put that knife away. You'll get killed."

Qumola pulled a sheath out from her pocket and returned the knife inside.

"Do you hate me that much?"

There was no answer.

Qumola firmly puckered her lips and stared at Enlike with eyes full of hatred. There was no trace of the usual cowardice on her face. From her behavior, he could understand that this was no trick of his imagination.

"Enlike-san. This is the fifth one."

"Yeah."

"Every time even a single person dies, I become so sad I want to die myself.

Did you know that I keep resisting my desire to die, see another person die again, become sad, and want to die again, Enlike-san?

I gradually became unable to tell whether I am living or not. My heart is steadily dying along with them. Do you understand my feelings? Enlike-san."

"I don't."

"Is that so? That's because you love killing so much."

Qumola kept talking.

"Five people have died already. I have also died five times. Hey, isn't that unfair? Can't you die just once?"

Qumola hit Enlike with violent words that he never heard before.

He wanted to tell her he was sorry, to forgive him, to apologize to her. But he couldn't. Enlike couldn't act any other way. Because if he were to apologize at all, it would have to be about that fact that he was still alive.

"Did you enjoy? Killing them, that is. Did everyone dying made you feel good, Enlike-san?"

"…"

"Is killing that much fun? If it's that much fun, then you should just kill me, Boramot, Ganbanzel and everyone else and get it over with!!!"

Qumola kept spitting words of resentment while crying.

It was unbearably sad.

"…I don't want to."

Enlike said.

"…Huh?"

"I don't want to kill anymore."

He muttered.

"I just kill, and kill, and don't enjoy it at all. I never did, even once."

"…"

"We were taught that killing is enjoyable. I also thought it was supposed to be so. But I'm…"

Enlike's words stopped there. He couldn't utter a continuation.

"…A…haha."

Qumola laughed. Pulling at her face, she laughed in a broken voice.

"Why are you… telling me… such a cruel… thing now…"

"I wanted to smile. That was all I wanted."

Qumola stopped laughing and began crying.

"Why are you telling me this now…"

She kept crying while saying this.

Enlike didn't have any reply. He raised his wounded body, supported himself on the wall and went outside.

"What's wrong, Enlike? What are you doing like this?"

After he walked around as if crawling, he found Boramot. He came running to Enlike. He tried assisting him and was surprised seeing his expression.

Enlike was crying.

"…Enlike. Why are you crying?"

"Boramot. Let's stop."

"What?"

"Boramot, stop this, I can't do it anymore."

Boramot struck his cheek.

"What are you trying to do, bastard?!"

Enlike fell down listlessly. Boramot then jeered at him.

"Can't do it? Are you kidding me! Do you think you're allowed to?!"

"I'm…"

"Shut up!"

Boramot kicked Enlike's body.

"…What did that mouse do to you?"

Muttering this, he walked towards his cabin in quick steps.

"Enlike, I misjudged you."

While spitting that parting remark at him, Boramot went away.

"…"

Enlike raised his body and wobbled forward.

"Where should I go…"

He muttered. After using up his strength by coming to the beach, he collapsed.

After this, things happened the unconscious Enlike was not aware of.

Boramot returned to the cabin and kicked the door open. Qumola wasn't there anymore. He picked up a bottle of liquor, drank one sip and threw it on the floor.

"Damn it!"

He spat out.

*In the end even Enlike is broken. I shouldn't have let Sasari die. The rest are hopeless trash.*

*There's probably no longer any chance of producing a monster on this island.*

*But I'm not the one at fault. It's all because of those piece of shit Meats. If we just had a few more Meats, I'm sure creating a monster would have been possible.*

*There was something wrong with Ganbanzel's orders to begin with. No matter how many Meats will be taught Magic, they couldn't possibly defeat Hamyuts Meseta.*

"I shouldn't have followed Ganbanzel-sama. Following him wouldn't get me to Heaven. Cigal-sama would be much better."

Boramot kicked the bottles of alcohol at his feet.

And at that moment, he heard a voice inside his head. One of Ganbanzel's protégés was a Magician who could use Thought Sharing.

'We haven't spoken in a long time, Boramot.'

Ganbanzel's voice resounded. Boramot instinctively stood at attention.

'Your health is far more important.'

'Enough with the greetings, you fool.'

Ganbanzel sent an angry thought. Boramot felt ashamed.

'So, what about Enlike? And also the one called Sasari. They're making good progress, right?'

'No, err, they're both no good.'

'…Ho. What do you mean?'

'Sasari wasn't good material. And Enlike has fallen for a girl.'

'So, what are you going to do, Boramot?'

'They're both hopeless Meats. With all due respect, no matter how much I try with them, there is nothing I can do.'

'Hmm…'

Ganbanzel thought for a while.

'…You are incompetent.'

Boramot felt a shiver run up his spine. If Ganbanzel were to abandon him, everything will be over. He will become as worthless as a Meat. If he couldn't do something, he will surely just become a Meat.

'Ganbanzel-sama, please reconsider. I am…'

'Good grief, it seems I was not blessed with good subordinates. The only one working properly is Enlike.'

'Ganbanzel-sama, Ganbanzel-sama!'

The Thought Sharing was cut off. With a pale face, Boramot drank more liquor.

*Why did it turn out like this?* Boramot thought with a drunken mind.

And he started running – towards the caverns on the cliff where the Meats were.

"Get Qumola out!"

Boramot shouted. Qumola was the source of everything. That mouse seduced Enlike and broke him. If she wasn't there, everything would have gone well.

"Didn't you hear me? Bring out Qumola!"

Qumola showed herself from the cave and Boramot invoked his Magic. His clothes stretched forward, attempting to kill by twisting her body.

Just as she raised a small shriek, a figure collided with Boramot. It was Kayas.

Kayas knocked him down with a ramming attack, and then shouted towards his friends inside the caves.

"Qumola, run away! Everyone, hold Boramot down!"

"You, bastard…"

Clothes wrapped around Kayas's body and began twisting. The squeezed body fell on the ground with a thud.

"Kayas-san!"

Qumola shouted. At the same time, the group that came out of the caves all attacked Boramot at the same time. There was a whip that moved while disregarding the laws of physics, a chop with a hand that was sharper than a sword, a sword created using hardened sand – everyone attacked Boramot while freely using their abilities.

"You're in the way, bastards!"

Boramot's clothes spread far, repelled their attacks and captured them.

A single band grabbed Qumola's foot. And just as it tried breaking her bones,

"Qumola!"

Help came. Kayas, who was supposedly crushed to death earlier, helped Qumola tear off the clothes.

Kayas's ability was super regeneration. He was immortal as long as he still had some signs of life.

"Qumola, come with me!"

Kayas lifted Qumola and started running.

"Wait, Kayas!"

Boramot tried chasing them. However, their friends all blocked his path.

Voices could be heard from the distance. Enlike, who was lying atop the sand, opened his eyes.

Something was happening at the caves area. Enlike grimaced due to the sharp pain he felt while trying to raise his body.

"…Shit."

Just as he murmured this, he could hear a voice inside his head. There was no way he could have forgotten it. It was Ganbanzel's voice.

'It has been a long time, Enlike. This is the power known as Thought Sharing. Stay silent and listen to me.'

"…"

'Enlike. I heard that you have been abandoned by Boramot.'

Enlike recalled Boramot's angered expression. He was probably abandoned then.

'Boramot is an absolutely incompetent man. He denied your feelings, turned you into a heartless killing machine, and thought he could make a monster like that. I can't understand him at all.

What was it I said? I said that killing was wishing for the supreme pleasure. Think back to Hamyuts Meseta. The one who abides his feelings by fighting and killing is a monster.'

*But*, Enlike thought, *I don't enjoy fighting at all*.

'Enlike, rethink this one more time. Who is the one who pained you? Who is the one who hurt you? Don't you want to erase those who stand in your way, those who are unneeded? It will be enjoyable for sure.

Isn't this the only thing left for you to do?'

While dragging his aching body, Enlike slowly rose up.

Boramot was running. His body was wounded and his clothes were torn off here and there. He chased after Qumola who went farther ahead behind the caves and into the forest.

His feet stopped. Kayas stood in his way.

"Where did Qumola go?"

"As if I'd tell you, you piece of shit."

"Then, after I'll kill you I'll carefully search for her."

His clothes, which were lessened by the all the tears, spread towards Kayas. Kayas fought back by trying to tear them off.

"Did everyone die?"

Kayas asked.

"Of course!"

Boramot answered. Kayas clenched his teeth in chagrin and faced Boramot.

When Enlike got his wounded body there, the fight had already ended.

The exhausted Boramot sat down and Kayas's body lay scattered to pieces.

Enlike didn't think of him as his friend, but seeing him dead like this made him feel a slight pang of loneliness in his chest. However, those were temporary feelings. They soon disappeared like a flake of snow and he forgot about them.

"Enlike, I'll give you a final chance, you bastard. Find Qumola who is hiding somewhere and kill her."

Boramot said haughtily. Seeing him like this was extremely unpleasant.

Enlike turned his palm towards Boramot.

"…Huh?"

Boramot looked at that palm without understanding what was happening. His expression stayed like that all the way until his brain was fried by Enlike's lightning.

Enlike barely dragged his aching body as he looked for Qumola. Before long, the morning sun faintly peeked from the sky. He found her pushing her petite body inside a thicket.

"Qumola, you can come out now."

"Enlike-san? Why are you…"

"…It's over."

"What's over?"

Qumola timidly exited the thicket and ran past Enlike's side.

Immediately afterwards, Enlike could hear her screams and cries. That crying voice, that felt as if it shaved off his very life, made his heart ache.

Enlike thought to himself – *Qumola will probably never smile again. Because she has no-one left.*

"Everything… Just torments me…"

Enlike kept walking while muttering this.

"Once I kill it becomes easy."

The fact that Qumola was crying. The fact that he killed her friends. The fact that he made her suffer and she was suffering. All of those were sad and painful.

*Therefore I'll kill her*, Enlike thought. *I'll erase it all*, he thought.

He turned his palm to Qumola's back.

If he were to kill Qumola, he would surely become a monster this time. He will become a monster and forget everything except fighting and killing.

He wanted to smile. And in order to grant that wish, he had no other choice.

A single bolt of lightning struck her petite body. Qumola fell to the ground too quickly, as if she was a doll.

# Chapter 7: The Girl's Folly, the Undying Monster

Noloty and Minth came to the beach Zatoh waited at just a while ago. The winged ants left for surveillance were now flying around in vain.

"…He really did escape."

Noloty muttered while looking around. Minth stared at the sand next to her.

"There's blood. It's his blood."

He rose up and prompted Noloty.

"We can't let him go to the city. Let's chase after him, Noloty."

The two started running atop the sand.

Around that time, he found himself standing quite far from the city. He was far from the place he had been waiting at. He didn't know why he was there. His memories were jumbled. His mind was in disorder.

Then, a tremor assaulted his entire body.

He crawled and rolled on the ground. He scattered lightning around, screaming like a beast. He felt pain as if his head split apart and he felt the illusion of his body being torn to shreds.

*I can't hold him back. Until now I could inflict some pain and he would go inside. I would bear the pain in my body, push it out and drag him back inside.*

*But it wasn't like this now. No matter how much pain I push to him, he still tries possessing me. He became frantic inside my body.*

He fired lightning at his own body in an attempt to suppress the enemy coming from within.

"Don't come out!"

He shouted and writhed.

The two continued running. It wasn't hard chasing after Zatoh's traces. Here and there were spots of blood on the sand – the signs of a person rampaging. He produced indiscriminate violence while hurting himself and left many traces around.

"…I've seen this somewhere."

Noloty thought back. The train Luimon Mahaton's Book was stolen from was assaulted just like that.

"…Here he is."

Minth murmured. They found Zatoh collapsed atop the sand.

When Noloty trying rushing to him, Minth held her from behind.

"…Get down."

Saying so, Minth pulled out a gun and shot six times. With each shot, fresh blood flew around like fireworks.

"Don't even think of stopping me, Noloty."

He said.

"Are you going to kill him?"

"In a second his personality changed to that of another person. He's now the Monster without any doubt."

Minth took out his sword and ran. Applying his body's weight with a long jump, he pierced Zatoh's body. Zatoh raised a voiceless scream.

"Zatoh-san!"

Noloty shouted without thinking. After Minth pulled his sword out, Zatoh stood up and began vomiting.

"…Minth, Noloty… Kill me."

Despite him being unable to talk, his lips moved so. While frowning, Minth asked a question.

"Hey, why did you eat the Monster's Book?"

"…Kill, me."

The words coming back were not intended as an answer. Minth resumed his attack.

It was too gruesome of a sight. Even after sustaining injuries that would kill a normal person ten times over, he kept living. Even after shedding ten times the amount of blood that would become lethal, as well as bearing ten times the pain, Zatoh was still standing.

Noloty couldn't watch it. No, even Minth who wielded his sword to attack probably felt the same.

Minth screamed and struck with all of his strength. He wanted to end Zatoh's agony.

"…His regeneration's weakened."

Minth muttered. Retreating far behind, he placed the sword on his shoulder, preparing. He poised himself to leap forward and apply his entire body's weight to a sword attack so he could slice Zatoh apart from head to spine. When she saw this, Noloty acted.

What made Noloty move like this at that time?

Was it because Hamyuts ordered her to save him?

Was it because Zatoh said he wouldn't kill anymore?

Was it the resolve she held during her training that she would defeat people without killing them?

"Minth-san, stop!"

Noloty bound Minth's arms behind his back.

"Are you stupid?!"

Minth shouted.

"….Ah."

Zatoh muttered.

At the same time, Hamyuts also muttered.

"Well done, Noloty."

Minth broke free from Noloty. Her body was flung back and she landed on sand.

When he once again readied his sword, something unusual happened.

Fast water bullets drove into the two as if shot from a machinegun. Both Minth and Noloty were lightly blown ten meters away.

"Wh-"

Noloty, who collapsed on the sand, looked at Zatoh. He was smiling. A repulsive smile rose to his blood-smeared face.

"…Zatoh-san."

Noloty called him. But while doing so, she knew she was wrong. She didn't need Minth's Sacred Eyes to know that his expression was wrong. His eyes were wrong. His thirst for blood was wrong.

The wounds on his body began bubbling. His regeneration became much faster than before.

"…That bastard, using my body as he liked."

While smiling, Zatoh spat out curses. Minth rose up behind Noloty and talked.

"…It's been a long time, Monster-kun."

Holding a sword in his right hand and a gun in his left, Minth pushed Noloty away and came to the front.

"Lemme hear your name. The guy until now was Zatoh, but who are you?"

"No, you're wrong."

The Monster began speaking with his arms spread open.

"I'm Zatoh. The Book-Eating Monster is Zatoh."

"…What?"

"I have been possessed. Till just now. By that piece of shit, Enlike Bishile."

Zatoh Rondohone didn't know the circumstances of his own birth. For as long as he could remember, he was in a spacious cabin inside a ship. At his side was a single old man.

Perhaps he was a baby with transparent hair taken from a family called Rondohone. Maybe he would be able to find them if he were to search. However, Zatoh didn't think about that at all. He could get whatever he wanted and do whatever he wanted to anyway.

No matter what kinds of bad things he did, he wasn't scolded even once. When he asked the old man called Ganbanzel besides him about this, this was his answer:

"It's because you are special."

An environment where everything would be forgiven and transparent hair. Because he was so different than anyone else, he didn’t doubt he was special.

"I want to try killing people."

It was quite natural of him to ask Ganbanzel for that, and it was also natural that he would be forgiven for it.

When he grew up, Ganbanzel taught him about the Indulging God Cult's doctrine and the reason for his existence. He was going to eat the Books of various possessors of abilities and become a monster for Ganbanzel's sake.

"I see, that is fine."

Ganbanzel nodded contently hearing those words.

Zatoh didn't make an effort in anything. All the effort was that of the Meats he ate, not his. He kept stuffing himself with the Meats' Books brought to him.

"You said you'll make them into monsters, huh. You're quite cruel, geezer."

"I didn't lie. More precisely, they would become a part of the monster."

One day, Ganbanzel said,

"The youth named Enlike was apparently broken. We're probably done with that island. Instead of turning them into human bombs, let's annihilate them all."

Zatoh said,

"Hey, geezer. What would Enlike do if you tell him to?"

Zatoh's plan was successful. Ganbanzel was happy when he was told of the island's annihilation.

Zatoh went to the island, accompanied by the mysterious man called Lascall Othello that was introduced to him by Ganbanzel.

There he saw Enlike who turned into an empty shell.

His eyes reflected nothing and he wasn't even able to stand on the beach. His face was distorted in the shape of a smile just like the time he was on the ship.

"…Goodbye, Enlike-kun."

Enlike didn't even turn his face around. He quietly passed away after getting roasted by Zatoh's fireball.

# Final Chapter: The Swamp of Souls, the Memory of a Smile

Minth readied his sword.

"I don't care whether you're Zatoh or Enlike. If I kill you it will finish the job."

"Oho, you'll kill me? Are everyone in Bantorra Library all bark and no bite?"

"If it's you, I can do it."

Minth slowly headed towards Zatoh atop the sand.

The stunned Noloty watched them. It didn't take her long to understand her actions brought the Monster back.

"…Minth-san, I…"

"…Noloty, that doesn't matter right now. Just go away."

Minth coldly rejected her.

"Hey, are you going to let him talk to you like this, Noloty-chan?"

The Monster – Zatoh – smiled with his face full of blood.

"Hey, Noloty-chan?"

Zatoh swung his hand. Minth and Noloty both ducked towards the sand at the same time.

"Let's play together."

Water bullets passed above their head.

"You piece of shit!"

Minth shouted and started running with a low posture like a leopard. His protruding sword was then entwined by a sleeve extended to the length of around ten meters.

"Minth-san!"

Noloty also rose up and tried running. Lightning struck just in front of her, stopping her charge.

Minth threw his sword and leapt sideways. However, Zatoh read his movement. The cloth released the sword and entangled Minth's legs. An unpleasant sound was heard. Minth toppled over and his legs were bent in an unnatural angle.

Noloty ran while clenching her fist. Long before that fist could reach its target, it was intercepted by water bullets and she was sent flying, rolling on the sand.

"Is that all? Let's play some more, Noloty-chan."

Zatoh shook his sleeve and smiled towards Noloty while his body emitted sparks.

Enduring the pain in her creaking bones, Noloty stood up.

"…Zatoh-san. No, Zatoh."

She started talking.

"What about Enlike, the person from before?"

Zatoh answered while slowly walking towards her.

"He's already finished. He won't come out ever again."

"…I see."

"Hey, Noloty-chan. Don't be so cruel.

I'm grateful. You're basically my savior."

Noloty kicked at the sand and ran ahead.

"Who would…"

Water bullets shot forward. She charged and repelled the attack with her fist.

"Who would want to save someone like you?!"

Zatoh's right hand glowed blue and a lightning strike was shot. When Noloty ceased her charge, the cloth on his right hand struck her like a whip and sent her flying.

Even so she rose up. Seeing that, Zatoh smiled with pleasure.

Enlike Bishile watched the fight from within Zatoh. No, it wasn't a fight. Zatoh simply harassed and toyed with her.

Enlike was watching that while standing inside deep mud.

The interior of Zatoh's body was a dark cave. Inside it was black, dark, and soggy swamp. The exit of the cave was enclosed by a solid yet transparent wall.

This was Zatoh's second stomach. It was the stomach not for digesting food but people's souls, one that only those with the Book-Eating ability possessed.

A stomach that could be seen but did not exist – Imaginary Entrails.

Many people were sunk inside the swamp along with Enlike. Lonkenny, Kayas, Sasari and all the rest of the boys from the island all floated inside as if they were ingredients in a stew.

Enlike crawled outside the swamp while dragging his body that became heavy due to the mud that clung to it.

Then, he drew closer to the wall separating the interior from the outside world. He hit it with his head. He hit it with powerless fists.

It didn't budge even one bit. Enlike struck the wall several times and then gave up.

He watched Noloty fight on the other side.

*Noloty, you're a real idiot.*

*This happened only because you tried saving someone like me.*

*You one you tried to save is trash. Absolutely worthless trash.*

Enlike recalled the day he first took control of Zatoh's body.

The figure of Ganbanzel who rejoiced the completion of a monster. The battle inside Bantorra Library and the subsequent withdrawal.

Enlike watched those scenes from inside the swamp. He thought that nothing mattered anymore. All of his feelings died inside the swamp.

The beat-up Zatoh came back to Ganbanzel's ship. He directed his anger of having lost at him. Ganbanzel stared at Zatoh loathsomely as he blamed him.

"Don't worry, Zatoh. This isn't your full power yet. You need to eat more and get stronger."

"So what am I supposed to do, old man? Are there any other Books for me to eat?"

"…There's the man called Luimon."

Zatoh escaped the pursuers from the Library and went to Toatt Mining Town while concealing himself. There, he waited for Luimon's Book to be discovered and then attacked the train that carried it. Because he attacked the Library before, the Armed Librarians have spread around and thus security was thin.

Zatoh easily snuck onboard the train, pried the safe open and ate Luimon's Book. Luimon's large body fell inside the swamp and sunk next to Enlike.

Zatoh shook in rage and disappointment after he finished eating.

"Goddamn, this shit, he only uses physical strength!"

Luimon's Book was useless for him. He looked around him like a hungry beast. Wondering if he could still find some ability for him to use, he touched anything he could lay his hands on.

At that time, Zatoh touched a single specific Book.

Enlike became shocked at the oncoming memories.

*Why is this here? That's Qumola's Book.* Her memories came flowing inside Enlike and Zatoh.

Qumola was a Meat. She spent her worthless days inside the same ship as Enlike. The only things her eyes had seen were bread crumbs on the floor. Her life consisted of simply picking up and eating those.

One day, Qumola felt bad. She felt cold and nauseous. It was probably an illness that would be cured in no time if she were in the outside world. However, it was lethal for the Meats, who didn't live like humans. She understood that she was dying.

It wasn't sad or painful. She was dying – that's all. Qumola lay on the floor and quietly awaited death.

However, a hand came in touch with her body. A Meat snuggled close to her and warmed her cold body.

"…Hang on there. Can I get some medicine here?"

Qumola was surprised to hear the boy raise his voice. There shouldn't have been any Meat who did that sort of thing.

"…What are you…?"

She inquired. The boy snuggling close to her answered.

"I'm Relia."

The boy talked to the caretaker that came in.

He told him he wanted medicine or a warm drink. The caretaker hit him in response. 'If that's no good, then at least a blanket or some clothes', he said.

The caretaker kept beating the boy and took him to the punishment cell. Qumola stared at this happening while lying on the floor.

She thought it was strange. *Why did he say that? There's no point in helping me. I'm a completely worthless Meat. There's no use helping such a thing.*

However, she noticed – at the very least, she wanted to help that person.

She thought to herself – *I'll try surviving a little*. She hugged her shaking body and sipped some water from the floor. She stripped the rags from the sleeping Meats around her and wrapped herself.

Qumola endured the cold with all her might and refused the oncoming death. Eventually, her condition became better in a way that disappointed even herself.

That person came back three days later. With his wounded, tattered body, he looked like he needed medicine much more than Qumola who had already recovered.

"…Huh. So you're better now."

As Relia looked at Qumola, there was a smile on his swollen face.

Enlike felt nostalgic. It was the first smile he had seen.

"Why are you smiling?"

Qumola asked.

"…Wouldn't you be happy if another person was saved?"

"Happy?"

She said to Relia and he suddenly grew silent.

"…I was told I was worthless."

He abruptly murmured.

"We're all going to die without anyone thinking about us. So we might be worthless.

But… if there's something important and it can be protected, I think that's also part of a person's value. I'm happy. If I at least managed to help you, I'm not worthless."

And Enlike thought – *I see. So that's how it was.*

Not long after that, a caretaker took some Meats from inside the ship. He said that because the number of Meats increased, they made a new place for them. Qumola stayed alone once again.

She spent idle days while thinking back to Relia. She recalled his words and his smile.

Qumola came to possess a single hope. She wanted to be able to smile like Relia. She wanted to get out of the ship and become something of value, no matter how small.

After a while, a man accompanied by a caretaker came to the room.

"What we need is a healthy female Meat that can work well."

The caretaker said. The man next to him, Boramot, briefly looked around the room and spoke in a disinterested tone.

"Doesn't seem to be anything of use here."

Just as Boramot was about to exit, Qumola clung to his feet.

"What are you doing!"

The caretaker kicked her off. Boramot then stopped and asked,

"Meat. What do you want?"

"Won't you use me?"

It was a gleam of hope. She didn't want to die as a Meat. It was the chance of a lifetime for Qumola who wished so. She didn't know what would happen to her afterwards. However, she didn't think there would be any other chance to leave this boat.

"Well, she seems good enough."

Her wish was granted. Boramot picked her up and beckoned her to follow him.

After he brought her to the small island, Boramot explained Qumola's purpose to her. She was to look after those who are training to become monsters. This was the only job handed to her.

At first she was scared.

The boys kept thinking about fighting and polished techniques for killing each other on a daily basis. She spent her time scared of them, as they were far removed from someone like the gentle Relia.

"…Wouldn't you be happy if another person was saved?"

From time to time, she recalled Relia's words. However, Qumola had no idea how she could help people. On this island, she was the only one completely powerless.

One day, when she was sleeping on the hammock inside her cavern, her face was suddenly grabbed.

"Don't make any voice… Come with me."

One of the boys embraced Qumola and took her outside. She asked him what they were doing.

"…We're running away. I can't be here even one more second. I'll take you as a hostage and steal a boat."

"…There's no way you can do that."

Qumola said in a shaking voice. The boy started crying.

He spoke to her on the dark beach. The boys were going to start killing each other from now on. He didn't want to fight. He didn't want to die.

Qumola noticed – those people, whom she thought were scary, were actually very unhappy. She wanted to save them, just as Relia saved her. However, as she only knew how to act as a maid, she couldn't think of any method to do so.

"…Why are you crying?"

He said. He tried comforting her as he caressed her small head.

That boy was called Kayas. From then on, they became friends.

"Here you go."

Kayas tore his military ration apart and gave it to Qumola. It was their daily routine ever since they became friends.

While eating, she directed a question to Kayas.

"Why do you do this every day? Is it fine if you won't eat, Kayas-san?"

"It's fine. It's just that you, umm, don't eat much."

Her not eating much was Kayas's misunderstanding. Once a day she ate the same military ration as the rest. Since Qumola's body was so petite, eating that much was enough for her.

So it wasn't like she really needed it. However, Kayas would look very sad when she refused him.

Oddly, from then on everyone else also started to leave some of their food to her.

They also gave her small seashells and pretty rocks. They would bring Qumola anything unusual they found on the island. Little by little but assuredly, those boys who were separate became comrades.

One day, Qumola talked with Kayas.

"Kayas-san, why are everyone so good to me?"

Kayas looked slightly abashed and averted his gaze.

"Well, 'cause… stupid, don't ask things like that."

Qumola nudged his head.

"But I think it's unfair. Everyone is so nice to me even when I didn't do anything."

"Stupid, that's not it at all…"

Kayas was smiling, but Qumola looked depressed.

"I'm always thinking about how I can help you guys. I can't do anything, and it's really painful for me."

"…Hey, Qumola. Do you remember the time we came here? We used to never talk with each other and were detached. Did we have any choice? We had to live while someday killing each other. Not even one of us could think of the others as his comrades."

"…"

"When you said you like everyone here, we first became friends."

"Is that so?"

"We're now all friends. You can be proud of that. You've helped us more than enough."

At that time, her wish to smile just like Relia was granted.

She lived in order to love everyone. Qumola had sworn to protect them all.

However, their happy times were soon gone.

One day, after Qumola woke up, one of the boys was missing. Everyone looked at the ground and kept silent about that one missing boy.

"Why?"

Qumola asked Kayas.

"Forget about him."

She understood that the time for them to kill each other had come.

Qumola saw one boy sit on the edge of the circle. He was a boy with gloomy eyes who never spoke with her – Enlike Bishile. Qumola had a hunch – that guy had killed.

Looking at his gloomy eyes frightened her to the extent that she felt a shiver run up her spine.

Qumola forced herself to forget about their dead comrades and days passed along. It was so she could live enjoyably among those who were still living.

However, more and more people were gone. Gradually, Qumola smiled less and less, and finally stopped smiling at all.

Qumola hated him – she hated Enlike for wanting to kill the rest who were so gentle and sad.

She hated him for taking away the things she bet her life on protecting.

Finally, that day had come. Enlike was wounded in exchange for taking Sasari's life. He was lying powerless in front of her.

Qumola waited for a chance when Boramot wasn't around and clenched a knife.

However, her plan was easily seen through.

He was going to kill her anyway. Therefore, she had to say the things she wanted to at the very end.

Qumola assaulted Enlike with her words of anger.

However, his answer didn't come in the form of a lightning strike but in the form of words outside her expectations.

"…I don't want to."

Enlike confessed. He told her that he didn't enjoy it at all, rather he was pained by it.

*How terrible*, Qumola thought.

She thought of him as a monstrous human, kept hating him, and now he told her this.

The enemy she wanted to kill was simply an unhappy person. He was only unhappy, same as the people she swore to protect.

She couldn't hate Enlike.

She tried killing the person she should have protected. Qumola was brought to tears by this realization. She should have understood Enlike's suffering. Why didn't she understand this until now?

"Kayas-san."

Qumola talked to him afterwards.

"…I think Enlike is one of our friends."

"If you think of him as a friend, then he is. What do you think about him, Qumola?"

She answered,

"He killed many people and was hurt a lot. But I still think of him as a friend."

However, a day where Enlike and Qumola could come to understand each other never came.

At that time, Boramot already came in order to kill her.

Qumola and Enlike were separated without having understood each other. Enlike's lightning struck her and all of his thoughts have disappeared in vain.

Inside the swamp Enlike was thinking - *Qumola didn't hate me. She once did, but then she didn't until the very end. I wasn't all alone. I was their friend just like she said.*

*Why couldn't I notice that? If I did, we might have been still living together.*

*What should I do?*

Enlike was the person who crushed his most important thing by his own hands.

He should have understood her and kept living together with her, but he was the one who killed her.

*What should I do? It's obvious. I have no choice but to die.*

Enlike banged his head against the wall. It shook the Imaginary Entrails enough to make a sound. Enlike's empty mind and his powerless body have started moving him with anger. It was the most intense anger in this world – anger towards himself.

Zatoh felt an abnormality. His head began hurting and he felt as if his very soul was being dragged out of his body.

"What!"

Zatoh shouted. His head, hands, and entire body began trembling.

"…This, this is…!"

He squirmed.

Enlike pounded the wall with his nonexistent forehead and fists. Each blow was as if he was trying to destroy his body along with the wall. The thick wall started developing cracks.

He struck the wall with his entire body. At that moment, it broke. Enlike rose up and Zatoh fell.

The next instant, Enlike was no longer in the Imaginary Entrails but found himself standing on a running train.

He was confused for a short while. These were not his hands. This was not his hair. He was a little confused by those facts.

"…"

His right hand began trembling. Enlike could feel Zatoh, who had the pilot seat taken away from, struggling from within his body.

He could feel him trying to take control back from his right hand to his entire body.

Enlike broke that hand's fingers. He could feel Zatoh flinching inside him.

"Does this much cause a monster like you to flinch like that?"

Enlike said towards Zatoh inside his body.

"Just this much causes that reaction. How ridiculous."

Enlike next slung his entire body against the wall of the train. He hit the floor with his fist and struck the door with his face. The breaking of his bones and the impacts strong enough to cause spurts of blood all made Zatoh inside wince in pain.

Enlike shot lightning at his own body.

As the train broke down and abruptly stopped, Zatoh no longer had any way of resisting.

Enlike started walking unsteadily.

*I'll die*. He was walking while thinking of this.

Those were the details of that incident. Those were the foolish traces of the person who wanted to smile.

It was the tale of a fool who wanted to smile but couldn't achieve it, wanted to become a monster but couldn't achieve it, and even when he wanted to die he couldn't achieve it.

Enlike hit the wall with his fists. It didn't budge. The power of Enlike's soul had declined and Zatoh's Imaginary Entrails were strengthened. Right now, it was impossible for Enlike to shatter the wall and come outside once again.

Before long, he stopped hitting the wall with his fists.

*That's enough. Let it end like this. Without thinking anything, without seeing anything, everything will be much easier*. Just as he thought so, Enlike's body which was out of the swamp started sinking again. If he were to be pulled inside the swamp like that, Enlike's consciousness would be erased from this world.

Just as he thought so, Enlike's back was suddenly pushed by someone.

'What're you doing, Enlike?'

He could hear someone telling him this from inside the swamp.

Zatoh was looking down. Noloty glared back at him and rose up. She understood she was being toyed with. However, she had no choice but to confront him.

"Hey, Noloty-chan, aren't you tired already? If you just stand there and let me kill you so easily what am I going to do?"

Noloty didn't answer. She simply and straightforwardly charged at him. She did nothing but head towards him even while being blocked by water bullets and cloth.

Her attack was intercepted once again. Zatoh stared at the fallen Noloty who stood up with a bored look.

"That's enough, it's time for you to die."

"…Shut up."

Deadly lightning shone in Zatoh's hand. He slowly directed that hand towards Noloty.

'What're you doing, Enlike?'

Someone asked from within the swamp.

'I'm not doing anything. I can't do a thing anymore.'

Enlike answered.

'Isn't it enough? Let it end.'

'That's no good. You can't do that.'

The voice started talking.

'Qumola tried saving us and you. That guy called Relia tried saving her. That girl fighting right now is trying to save you.

Think for a while. Did that girl and Qumola ever give up?'

'…'

'We won't allow it. Do you think we'll give you the luxury of being the only one who can give up?!'

'What should I do?'

'Think. You idiot. Try looking for something you can to turn things over with.'

Enlike pounded the wall with his clenched fists.

*Something that I will be able to do. Something I can do.*

*Oh, right. There's only one such thing.*

Enlike opened his eyes. He recited a single mantra inside his mind. That mantra he repeated without ever tiring while he was on that island, spending his days on with Qumola and the rest of his comrades.

*Those who go will not go, and those who come will not come. The moon is the sun. Birds are fish.*

Magic Deliberation, begin. Enlike started eroding the world's axioms.

Noloty ran. Lightning was about to be shot at her. She wasn't stuck to the ground like before. That lightning was aimed for her heart.

At that moment, bluish sparks burst out. The lightning that was supposed to have been shot was instead scattered.

Zatoh looked at his own hand. This was an unimaginable opening to create for himself in the midst of battle. Noloty's fist hit Zatoh for the first time.

Along with a sound indicating it broke his cheeks, his neck was bent directly to the side.

His mouth moved as if to ask why. Noloty's fist, drawing an arc in the air, caught his face.

Enlike gritted his teeth as he challenged the world's axioms. The Magic Deliberation of a person who already died – a seemingly impossible act – strongly rejected the world.

He finally succeeded twisting the axioms with just the power of his mind.

'Enlike Bishile controls lightning.'

On top of the rewritten axiom, Enlike added another one.

'The one to control lightning isn't Zatoh Rondohone.'

Noloty punched him a second time and pursued him even further. However, the third blow was blocked by Zatoh's cloth. It swooped on Noloty to catch her arms. As she was finally in the position for close-quarters combat, she couldn't give up here.

Zatoh was frightened more by his hand rather than from fighting Noloty.

"Why, why?!"

Zatoh extended his hand. He was probably going to shoot out lightning. But the hand aimed for Noloty simply moved in empty air.

Noloty smiled. She didn't know what was happening and why no lightning came out, but she clearly understood one thing – Enlike was fighting inside Zatoh.

"Enlike-san… Let's go!"

Noloty called and charged.

Zatoh returned fire with water bullets. He shot them out indiscriminately in a wide scope.

They were shot to stop Noloty's charge without caring for anything.

'When you try you can really do it, right, you piece of shit? But aren't you too slow?'

The voices from behind continued. Enlike turned around and saw their owners. The group of comrades popped their heads out of the swamp. Sasari directed the same hateful smile he had when he was alive towards Enlike.

'Who's slow here?'

Enlike spat at Sasari.

'You're the slow ones here.'

'That's obvious, you piece of shit.'

Sasari placed his hand on the edge of the swamp. He looked like a decomposing corpse; his bones could be seen as his body was digested inside the swamp.

Enlike held his hand out towards that body.

He prayed in his heart and he believed. He could control lightning. Before that body would be destroyed and its soul eaten, Enlike could control lightning.

'Do it, Enlike!'

Sasari shouted. Lightning shot from Enlike's hand.

'Right, Enlike. That's… good enough.'

With these last words, Sasari's soul was scattered and erased.

The water bullets stopped. Zatoh's face distorted in fear.

"This can't be…"

Zatoh shouted. Noloty closed in on him.

"Why is this happening?!"

Noloty grappled him like a wildcat and pushed his body down atop the sand.

As she rode on him, she held his body down using her legs and struck his face using both fists.

The clothes Zatoh wore started rampaging in trying to push Noloty away. But one fist from her was enough against his power that was diminished by his fear and bewilderment.

"This can't be!"

Zatoh's cry was drowned by Noloty's fist striking his lips.

"Next one, quickly!"

Enlike shouted. His comrades were desperately rising up from inside the swamp. Enlike kept using his lightning for their requiem. Zatoh could already barely use any power.

'En…like…'

Lonkenny, who became almost nothing but bones, rose from the swamp with help from his friends.

'Do it, Enlike.'

Enlike's lightning crushed Lonkenny and those who helped him.

Zatoh's screams could be heard from outside, things like *Why, how, what's happening?*

He tried to escape but Noloty's legs held him down. The cloth he was supposed to control was torn into shreds and the only things that could protect him now were only his arms.

*This is strange. It's definitely wrong.*

*If this was going to happen, I shouldn't have become a Monster.*

At that moment, the wall that Zatoh sealed cracked and shattered.

Zatoh escaped to the last refuge – the interior of his own body.

*What a fool*, Enlike sighed. *This is no refuge.*

'…Aah.'

When Zatoh saw the figure of Enlike who was clad in sparks of lightning, his expression conveyed utter despair.

Enlike slowly raised his hand. It was so he could erase Zatoh's soul from this world and put an end to it all.

If Zatoh, who possessed the ability of Book-Eating, were to disappear, these Imaginary Entrails should also disappear. Both Enlike and the souls still left inside will also vanish.

*That's fine*. This conclusion was Enlike's long-cherished ambition.

Just as he was about to shoot out his lightning, he heard a voice.

'Wait, Enlike.'

Enlike turned around. He saw Kayas's face peeking from the swamp.

'If you kill him, you'll die as well.'

'…That's fine by me.'

Enlike was ready to fire his lightning at the paralyzed Zatoh. However, just before this, a single man rose from the swamp and grabbed his body. Zatoh raised a terrified scream.

'You are…'

Enlike knew the man who grabbed Zatoh.

'Hello, Enlike-kun. I'm Luimon, but we don't appear to have time for this right now.'

As he said so, Luimon dragged Zatoh's body inside the swamp. Zatoh's resistance held no meaning against Luimon's strength.

'We'll hold him back. You go on.'

Kayas spoke to Enlike while sinking Zatoh in the swamp.

'Why should I live?'

Enlike asked Kayas.

'As a distraction.'

Kayas smiled while sinking in.

'I think it would be fine to let an idiot like you live on.'

Noloty stopped her fist. Zatoh stopped resisting. His head was smashed as if by a large boulder, his wounds bearing no consistent shape.

While remaining atop him, Noloty shed tears.

At that moment, his body started to regenerate. His shattered head went back to its previous form.

Noloty wiped her tears and clenched her fist.

"…Noloty."

The recovered mouth faintly spoke.

"…Which one are you?"

Noloty asked.

"Don't cry over people. Leaving aside your tears, your snot is dripping on me."

Noloty knew this blunt way of talking.

"…Enlike-san."

"You're in the way. You're heavy. Move."

Zatoh… no, Enlike complained quietly while lying sprawled.

"I got you to survive."

Noloty grinned at him.

"This isn't the time to smile. Don't do that."

Noloty looked at Enlike's face and replied.

"That also goes to you."

Thus, the story came to a close. It was the simple story of a boy who wished to be able to smile.

On that quiet beach, Enlike and Noloty faced each other and smiled for a long time.

# Fragment: The Real Monster

Ten days have passed since the end of the incident.

Minth's injuries were already healed. He still felt some discomfort in his legs, but his body was tougher than that of a normal person.

Minth went out of the hospital wing and was drinking alone at the tavern in Bantorra Library's downtown.

He was drinking straight gin. This 40-proof liquid permeated his tongue and poured down the back of his throat.

He wasn't drunk.

"Hello there, you great man."

At that time, a man sat next to the counter and called to him.

It was Mattalast.

"It wasn't a big deal."

"That's not true. A lot had happened but the result was the best case scenario, wasn't it?"

After he ordered "the same as always", high-grade whiskey was poured inside a glass with finely shredded ice. He began drinking it slowly as the ice melted on his tongue into a mist.

"Well, maybe."

Minth answered and poured more alcohol into his mouth in one go.

The incident had apparently ended like this - Hamyuts Meseta found the Monster but soon understood that his real identity was different. She also was able to capture rather than kill him, and even pulled out information from his collaborators. Hamyuts let Noloty persuade him and aimed to revive the Monster in order to annihilate the followers of the Indulging God Cult.

The Monster was almost resurrected once, but was then safely sealed by Minth and Noloty. Enlike complied with Noloty's dedicated persuasion, and promised to cooperate in the battle against the Cult while under Bantorra Library's patronage.

This was the full story of this incident as announced by Minth. Enlike and Noloty were also instructed to leave it like that.

Getting a member of the Indulging God Cult to become a collaborator and an ally was a huge achievement. Even the problem of Hamyuts's independent actions ended up unsettled due to this. Noloty had a problem with this, but seeing the result, she ended up leaving it alone for now.

Apparently this was a good conclusion. But if that were really so, Minth wouldn't try to get drunk like this.

"…Did Hammy do something again?"

Mattalast asked in a silent voice.

"You sure know her well."

"Because I've known her for a long time."

Mattalast knew Hamyuts from before she became an Armed Librarian - Minth recalled that fact.

"Won't you talk, Minth? What did you find out about her? I won't be surprised to hear something happened after all this time."

Minth ordered seven more glasses and began talking.

After the battle was over, the three people were wounded and exhausted. Minth couldn't move his feet and Noloty had bruises and near fractures throughout her entire body. Even Enlike, who had his super regeneration, couldn't stand easily due to his wounds.

"Are you alive, Minth?"

Enlike talked to him while getting up. Both of Minth's feet were twisted so that he couldn't move.

"It isn't a life-threatening wound. Don't worry."

Minth bluffed and endured the pain.

"A message came from Mirepoc. She said she's sending some people. In a while they'll come from the city. We'll just have to wait here quietly until then."

And just as they were discussing this…

Hamyuts Meseta appeared with a completely calm expression.

"Good job."

She said this with her usual smile. The head of an old man was hanging from her hand.

"…Ganbanzel."

Enlike muttered after seeing that head.

"Right, I killed him. But even though I brought it with me, when I think about it I don't have any use for it."

Saying this, Hamyuts threw Ganbanzel's head to the sea.

"It seems like it was dangerous. Wait a while and I'll treat you."

Hamyuts grabbed Minth's legs and corrected the position of his bones. She fixated them with splints and bandages and cooled them with a wet cloth. It was hard to think of her as the mastermind behind this incident after seeing her work like this.

"Hey, Director."

"What is it, Minth?"

"What a pity. You weren't able to fight the monster."

Minth spat out. He was angry. Rather than simply wanting to fight, she made a trap for Enlike and put Noloty in risk. She couldn't possibly be forgiven. Minth swore that he would definitely act to force her out of office.

"What're you saying?"

"Ha, always feigning innocence, huh?"

Minth directed his anger at Hamyuts.

"I didn't really want to fight the monster, so it isn't a pity."

"…Say what?"

"Because you know, my opponent is right here, isn't he?"

Hamyuts said and pointed at Enlike who lay atop the sand.

"Director! He is…!"

Noloty rose to shield him.

"I know. I heard about him from Ganbanzel. You're Enlike-kun, right?"

Noloty lost her words. Enlike rose up and got in front as if shielding Noloty.

"Oh, you can go back and sleep until you recover. I'm very patient so you can keep resting."

"What are you planning, Hamyuts?"

Hamyuts didn't pay any heed to Minth's angry roars and looked at Enlike.

"You have a good look in your eyes, Enlike-kun. You're a different person than before. I'm glad I made Noloty meet you. Honestly, I wasn't sure everything was working in the right direction, so I'm really happy."

"…"

"Actually, I didn't really expect anything from Zatoh. He fought just because he liked killing. He wasn't all that strong.

The strongest people are always those who fight for the sake of others. Those who confront powerful enemies and never flinch in front of any hardships are those who fight for someone else.

Isn't that right, Noloty?"

Hamyuts smiled.

At that moment, Minth noticed that he was shaking.

It was a fear he didn't feel even when he fought the Monster.

That was natural. After all, the whole incident with Zatoh had been nothing more than a useless farce created by Hamyuts.

"I also have someone I would call my patron. They probably don't think much of me, but I'll probably remember them for the rest of my life. Yes, I also have that kind of person.

Enlike-kun. Right now you resemble them a bit.

Ever since they saved me, I always wanted us to try killing each other by all means."

Enlike slowly came forward. Then, he said,

"…Even if you have a reason to fight, I don't."

"…Oh."

"You're only my past objective. I have no interest in you now."

"…What a cruel thing to say."

Hamyuts smiled like a little girl.

"You broke my heart."

And after saying this,

"Oh well. You'll come around one day. I'll wait for that."

Mattalast was silent.

"I thought of her as a difficult person, but I never thought she'd go that far. What should we do? Is it fine leaving her alone like this?"

Mattalast then spoke while smoking his pipe.

"Hey, Minth. I have some bad news. I actually invited Hammy to have a drink here today."

"…"

Minth turned around. He could feel his drunkenness and all color in his face being washed away. Hamyuts waved at him from the entrance of the tavern. She calmly came and sat down next to the pale Minth. She didn't behave as if she heard his words at all.

"The thing Minth's been drinking looks good. I want the same."

Hamyuts put the glass she was given to her mouth, but frowned.

"Wah, this is quite strong."

"Say, Hammy."

Mattalast talked while shaking his glass.

"Yeah?"

"…I believe you heard our conversation just now, but why didn't you take Noloty as a hostage?"

"What are you talking about, Matt? Don't be a weirdo."

"I never thought I would be told that by you, Hammy."

Mattalast held his head.

"Why would I have to take a cute kid like her hostage? I don't like that at all."

"But you want to fight, don't you? It would be fine."

"I don't understand you. Besides, do I have any reason to fight? Fighting without any reason isn't fun at all."

"So that's it."

"It's not that I like to fight anyone who's strong just because of that. What's important is how I feel. I want to feel like I'm going to get killed."

While saying this, Hamyuts smiled.

"I want to fight to the death with the kind of opponent that can't help but want to kill me."

As Minth looked at her smile, he said,

"Director. I feel as if I'd end up fighting you some day."

Hearing that, Hamyuts grinned at him.

"If you want to, I'm ready at any time. Because I'm patient, I'll wait however long you want me to."

Minth was thinking – *perhaps the fight against the monster wasn't yet over*.

The monster known as Zatoh was defeated. However, the real monster was still right there.

# Afterword

Hello everyone, this is Yamagata Ishio.

I was able to safely deliver to you the second installment, "Tatakau Shisho to Ikazuchi no Gusha". To those of you who have already read it, and those that are going to read it now, I hope you will enjoy it.

After the publication of my previous work "Tatakau Shisho to Koisuru Bakudan", I have received the impressions, encouragement and criticism of a lot of people. I am grateful for receiving each and every word. Among those, many people have asked me whether the story from the previous afterword about me setting up a desk inside the bathroom was true. I'm pretty good at lying to get some laughs, but this was true. Thank you all.

I shaved my head the other day. For a while, as my hair was split halfway in the middle, it became a so-called Otaku haircut, and as it felt annoying, I decided to try cutting it. It felt much like taking off a heavy coat at the beginning of spring, or perhaps more like loitering around with a towel after taking a bath; a truly liberating feeling.

Mentally, the thing known as hair seems to play the role of separating you from the outside world, so getting rid of even a small bit of it might give you a positive mood.

Visually, I look like some monk who escaped his training in the middle or a salary man prostrating himself on the ground after making a huge blunder at work, but since I'm a person who doesn't expect much from his outward appearance, it's not a big deal.

Also, it seems that the insulation of hair is more effective than normally thought of. I caught a cold two days after having my haircut and was sick in bed for five days. Let's all take good care of ourselves.

Finally, this time I am also much obliged towards many people. Maeshima-sama the illustrator, the Editor-in-Chief and the editorial department, those in charge of proofreading and design, and all those I am grateful towards, please allow me to thank you even if briefly.

And, to those who have gotten this book. I hope you will take good care of me from hereafter.

Let us meet again in my next work. Until then.

Yamagata Ishio